

Constructing a Cult

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Constructing a Cult

The Life and Veneration of Guðmundr Arason
(1161–1237) in the Icelandic Written Sources

By

Joanna A. Skórzewska



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CONVENTIONS

All Icelandic names in the index and bibliography are alphabetized under first names, *e.g.* ‘Þórðr Sturluson’, rather than ‘Sturluson, Þórðr’. All Icelandic and Scandinavian personal and place names are given in standardized Old Icelandic. Other names, for instance the names of foreign bishops and popes, have been translated into English (‘Ambrose’, rather than ‘Ambrosius’, etc.). References to all sagas are given by chapter. Sagas from *Heilagra Manna Sögur*, red. by Christian Richard Unger, are listed in the bibliography and referred to by the titles from that particular edition (‘Nikolaus saga erkibyskups’, etc.). For extra detailed information concerning individuals listed in *Sturlunga saga* (ed. by Jón Jóhannesson and others) I have referred to the list of genealogies in *Sts* II, 327–62 and the name index (*Nafnaskrá*) in *Sts* II, 363–473.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>BpS</i>	<i>Biskupa sögur</i> , ed. by Sigurgeir Steingrímsson and others
<i>DI</i>	<i>Diplomatarium Islandicum</i> = <i>Íslenzkt fornbræfasafn</i>
<i>GA</i>	<i>Guðmundar saga A</i>
<i>GB</i>	<i>Guðmundar saga B</i>
<i>GC</i>	<i>Guðmundar saga C</i>
<i>GD</i>	<i>Saga Guðmundar Arasonar, Hólabiskups, eptir Arngrím ábóta</i> (<i>Guðmundar saga D</i>)
<i>GJtb</i>	<i>Jarteinabók Guðmundar byskups</i>
<i>GP</i>	<i>Prestssaga Guðmundar góða</i>
<i>ÍslS</i>	<i>Íslendinga saga</i>
<i>JS</i>	<i>Jóns saga ins helga</i>
<i>K</i>	<i>Konungsbók (Grágás)</i>
<i>KLNM</i>	<i>Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for Nordisk Middelalder fra Vikingetid</i> <i>til Reformasjonstid</i>
<i>LM</i>	<i>Lexikon des Mittelalters</i>
<i>St</i>	<i>Staðarhólsbók (Grágás)</i>
<i>Sts</i>	<i>Sturlunga saga</i> , ed. by Jón Jóhannesson and others
<i>ÞJtb I</i>	<i>Jarteinabók Þorláks byskups in forna (Jarteinabók I)</i>
<i>ÞJtb II</i>	<i>Jarteinabók Þorláks byskups önnur (Jarteinabók II)</i>
<i>ÞA</i>	<i>Þorláks saga byskups in elzta (Þorláks saga A)</i>
<i>ÞB</i>	<i>Þorláks saga byskups yngri (Þorláks saga B)</i>
<i>ÞC</i>	<i>Þorláks saga byskups C</i>
<i>ÞE</i>	<i>Þorláks saga byskups E</i>

INTRODUCTION

Veittu, Kristr, at sjáim vér settan
Slíkan mann í vígðu ranni,
Fagna mundi flest in gegna
Ferðin þín, með glæstu skríni

Kvæði Guðmundar byskups
by Arngrímr Brandsson (d. 1361 or 62)

Abbot Arngrímr Brandsson is the author of the youngest *vita* about Bishop Guðmundr Arason which was written about one hundred and twenty years after the bishop's death in 1237. It was composed for a foreign audience, perhaps even papal audience, in the hope of achieving the canonization of Guðmundr. The *Kvæði* praises him as a holy man and is rich in authorial comments that allude to the official recognition of the bishop's saintliness and suggest that it was well known in the country. Five extant narratives and five poems in total have been devoted to Guðmundr's holy life and deeds, and a considerable part of *Íslendinga saga* (1280s) is devoted to the period of his episcopacy (1203–37). It is not a meaningless fact that four of the narratives and all of the poems were written in a relatively short period of time after the *translatio* of Guðmundr's bones in 1315.¹

Guðmundr Arason's personality and behaviour have often been presented as the cause of conflicts, and opinions on this subject differ a lot. Guðmundr has been called a nuisance,² “unreasonable in every way, showing disrespect both to men and to the law of the land”.³ At the same time, it has been said that “the popular regard for Bishop Guðmundr was very great”.⁴ The aim of the following discussion is a closer look at the perception of Guðmundr Arason's saintliness and the veneration of it as depicted in various written sources. Was

¹ Both the Latin form *translatio* and the English form translation are used interchangeably throughout the thesis.

² W. P. Ker, ‘Gudmund Arason’, *Saga Book*, 5 (1906/7), 86–103, p. 102.

³ J. H. Jørgensen, ‘Hagiography and the Icelandic Bishop Sagas’, *Peritia*, 1 (1982), 1–16, p. 15.

⁴ Ker, ‘Gudmund Arason’, p. 102.

Guðmundr really perceived as an idealist,⁵ an ecstatic,⁶ a martyr⁷ or a “Christian warrior”⁸ as modern research has claimed or are these generalizations far too simplistic? The topic of the book is the construction and development of Guðmundr’s cult. Although it is often problematic to establish the origins of a cult, a very brief definition of the phenomenon which I consider to be the most relevant here is as follows: one can speak of the beginning of a cult when the church in a local area develops practices related to the honouring of an individual who has lived and died as a person of exemplary holiness. Those practices include the commemoration of the person’s anniversary of death, prayers for intercession and visiting his/her burial place. As far as the material side of a cult is concerned, bringing votive offerings to the local church or to the saint’s grave and commissioning or making images of that person can be considered common practices. These, however, usually take place at a more advanced stage, when the reputation of the individual as a saint is more or less established among a group of people.

The question of how *fama sanctitatis* became established in a medieval society belongs to the vital issues in the discussion of any cult. It can be assumed that it could either be a spontaneous process which started among the faithful, or a conscious attempt by the Church (often influenced by secular leaders) to create and spread an image of a particular individual as a holy man. While the former often began with oral reports of the saint’s deeds and miracles as well as visiting certain places associated with the person, the latter could begin with commissioning hagiographical texts honouring him or her. The two factors need not be mutually exclusive; one may lead to the other. Still, even though texts commissioned by a specific group may have been inspired by the spontaneous veneration in the society, the construction

⁵ Magnús Jónsson ‘Guðmundur biskup góði’, *Samtið og Saga. Nokkrir Háskólafrirlestrar* (Reykjavík: Ísafoldarprentsmiðja H. F., 1941), 115–34, p. 115, Magnús Stefánsson, ‘Kirkjuvald eflist’, in *Saga Íslands*, ed. by Sigurður Línal, 8 vols (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag), II (1975), 55–144, p. 134.

⁶ Benjamin Kristjánsson, ‘Guðmundur biskup góði Arason. Sjö alda minning flutt á Hólum 29. ág. 1937’, *Kirkjuritið*, 3 (1937), 346–71, p. 356.

⁷ Benjamin Kristjánsson, ‘Guðmundur biskup’, p. 346.

⁸ Marlene Ciklamini, ‘The Christian Champion in Íslendinga saga. Eyjólfur Kársson and Aron Hjörleifsson’, *Euphorion. Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte* 82/2 (1988), 226–37, p. 227.

of a cult by the clergy usually had the decisive impact on the image of a saint. It could lead to the dedication of churches to the saint, the observance of his/her anniversary of death, and to the honouring of the person's grave and relics. That, again, would motivate a larger group of the faithful to venerate the saint. One might say that the process would be reversed: an organized form of cult would become the cause for group veneration, but then the veneration itself could hardly be called spontaneous. Such mass interest in a saint, triggered by a few official forms of cult, should rather be seen as a popularization of the individual's *fama sanctitatis*, the solidifying of it among the faithful.

The book examines the portrayal of Guðmundr's saintliness in the sagas and the depiction of the growing veneration of the bishop which led to an organized cult. The correspondence between the saga material and other types of written evidence such as annals and church inventories is the key to establishing if and how one led to the other. The abundance and type of the extant evidence is what distinguishes the veneration of Guðmundr from that of Jón Ögmundarson (the bishop of Hólar 1106–21, d. 23 April 1121) and Þorlákr Þórhallsson (the bishop of Skálholt 1178–99, d. 23 December 1199). It may be assumed that the construction of Guðmundr's cult had already begun with the first saga written directly after the bishop's death. However, one may argue that the fourteenth-century variants have given the image of his life and saintliness the decisive dimension. The book attempts to clarify whose initiative had the predominant impact on the "construction process", and under what circumstances it happened. I suggest that the initiative of the monastic circles in northern Iceland (Þingeyrar and Munkaþverá) was decisive, although not without the support of the laymen from that part of the country.⁹ Particular chapters discuss the way in which the image of Guðmundr's saintliness evolved with time, and examine potential reasons for the changes that can be observed in the texts.

The length of the time span under consideration has been dictated by two factors: the facts about Guðmundr's life and the composition

⁹ The outstanding activity of that milieu has been discussed *e.g.* by Sverrir Tómasson in "Norðlenski benediktínaskólinn", *The Sixth International Saga Conference*, 28/7–2/8 1985, Workshop Papers II (Copenhagen: Det Arnamagnæanske Institut 1985), 1009–1020, and *Íslensk Bókmenntasaga II*, ed. by Vésteinn Ólason (Reykjavík: Mál og Menning 1993), 249–263.

of the sources concerning him. The different versions of the *vita* are of special interest here because of the circumstances under which they were written down. The majority of the extant source material is dated to the post-Commonwealth period, the so-called “Norwegian Age” (*norska öldin*) from 1262/4—circa 1400. That fact is not meaningless as far as the official part of Guðmundr’s cult is concerned. Both the translation of Guðmundr’s relics and the washing of them in 1344 were performed by his Norwegian successors at the see of Hólar, Auðunn Þorbergsson (bp. 1313–1322) and Ormr Ásláksson (bp. 1343–1356). In 1365 a vow was made by another Norwegian bishop at Hólar, Jón Eiríksson *skalli* (bp. 1357–1390), in which an appeal to the pope was promised in order to start the canonization process.¹⁰ A similar promise was recorded in a vow dated to 1403. It was made by the inhabitants of the Eyjafjörður at the monastery of Munkaþverá at the time of the great plague, and is the first documented independent initiative of the society that has been preserved to our times. The end of the fourteenth century marks, thus, a new phase of Guðmundr’s cult when the official form of veneration developed and perhaps started reaching a solid ground among wider circles of society. While the date of Guðmundr’s birth, 1161, is the opening date for the period under consideration in this thesis, 1403 closes it.

In order to briefly clarify what was done about Guðmundr’s canonization and why it never took place, I shall mention a few extant documents. The discussion of the possibility of having Guðmundr canonized and the money collected for it is mentioned over a hundred years later, in letters from 21 May 1522 by Bishop Ögmundur Pálsson (bp. 1521–41) of Skálholt to Archbishop Eiríkr Valkendorf (abp. 1510–22), currently staying in Rome and Archdeacon (later Archbishop) Óláfr Engelbertsson (abp. 1523–37).¹¹ Another letter (with the same date) that mentions the payment is also referred to in the document signed by 24 priests from the diocese of Hólar.¹² A letter that was supposedly sent on 6 August 1524 from the papal scribe Zutpheldus Wardenberg to Archbishop Óláfr Engelbertsson explains a lot about the issue.¹³ Wardenberg informs the archbishop that he has talked with Cardinal Sanctorem

¹⁰ Possibly Pope Urban V (p. 1362–70).

¹¹ *DI IX*, 71.

¹² *DI IX*, 72.

¹³ *DI IX*, 201. The scribe (*scriptor apostolicus* from 29 December 1522) is elsewhere referred to as Zutfoldus/Zuffoldus/Tupholdus de Vardenberg/Vandenberg.

Quatuor (Lorenzo Pucci, 1513–31) about Guðmundr's canonization, and he, in turn, has discussed that with Pope Clement VII (pp. 1523–34). The pope wrote that he would not canonize anyone because he has observed that Leo X (pp. 1513–21) as well as Adrian VI (pp. 1522–3) died right after fulfilling such processes, and is afraid that the same would happen to him. Nevertheless, he agrees to permit the veneration of that Icelandic bishop. Guðmundr shall be pronounced blessed, and venerated on the same premises as Katarina, the daughter of St. Birgitta. It will be necessary for the King of Denmark and Iceland's prefect, as well as the archbishop, to write a formal letter to the pope and ask for his approval of this form of veneration. In addition a letter should be sent with a description of miracles performed by the saint, and the testimony of witnesses. Three hundred ducats should be enough to pay for all the expenses, (so that the advocate, the cardinal and others involved in the procedure receive their share). In his reply of 14 July 1527 Archbishop Óláfr Engelbertsson agrees to start the procedure.¹⁴ In another letter dated to 3 January 1526 Bishop Jón Arason (of Hólar, 1524–50) writes among others that gold and silver has been given by him to Archbishop Óláfr in order to start the canonization process, and the archbishop has promised to “have him canonized as soon as God allows” (“at lata canonicera goda guðmund suo framt þat være gudz uilie”).¹⁵

The exact dating of the documents is problematic; nevertheless two facts can be established with certainty. First, no other documents confirming further stages of the process have survived to our times, and it cannot be confirmed that it was successfully completed. Second, Guðmundr seems to have achieved the status of a “blessed” by that time, e.g. a testimony made at the monastery of Munkaþverá with the date 13 March 1510 uses as a reference point in time “miðvikuðaginn næstan fyrir festum beati godemundi episcopi et confessoris”.¹⁶ *Sigurðarregistr*, an inventory, mentions under the date 1525 “goda guðmundar skrin”, the “shrine of Guðmundr góði” as one of the Hólar bishopric's possessions, but does not reveal any details about it.¹⁷

¹⁴ *DI IX*, 346.

¹⁵ *DI IX*, 279.

¹⁶ “Wednesday before the commemoration day of blessed Guðmundr, bishop and confessor” (*DI VIII*, 251).

¹⁷ *DI IX*, 266–278.

Why would that particular individual become a famous figure and what are the main features underlined by the narratives that contribute to his fame? The saga material depicts Guðmundr as an interesting and complex character. He was born in 1161 at Grjótá in Hörgárdalur in northern Iceland. His father Ari (d. 2 November 1166) was the son of Chieftain Þorgeirr Hallason (d. 1169).¹⁸ Guðmundr's mother was Úlfheiðr Gunnarsdóttir (d. 1200), Ari Þorgeirsson's concubine. After Ari's death in Norway, Guðmundr was taken into the care of his uncle, Ingimundr Þorgeirsson (d. 1189), a charismatic priest, who took care of his priestly education. Since the boy was not allowed to inherit from his father, the family decided that this kind of career was appropriate for him. In 1185 Guðmundr was ordained as a priest and parted from his uncle, who soon afterwards died in a shipwreck in Greenland. At almost the same time the future bishop of Hólar lost his closest friend, Þorgeirr Brandsson (d. 1186) the son of Bishop Brandr Sæmundarson (bp. 1163–1201) after a grave illness. That event was a turning point for Guðmundr who, after quite a careless and obstinate childhood and adolescence, became a pious and devout clergyman. This piety, in combination with charitable work and his kind approach to people assured him the nickname *hinn góði*, the Good.

The period of Guðmundr's priesthood was rich in miracles, including many healings. Also his consecration of wells and springs which provided healing water, became a habit. He was a popular priest among the chieftains as well as among the rest of society. His active involvement in the cult of other saints, especially the Icelandic holy bishops Jón Ögmundarsson and Þorlákr Þórhallsson, also meant an increased use of relics. Thus, thanks to the family ties and good relations with chieftains, in 1201, after bishop Brandr's death, Guðmundr was elected the next bishop of Hólar.

His episcopacy has not been depicted in any source as an entirely peaceful period of time. The political structure in Iceland at the end of the twelfth and the first half of the thirteenth centuries was changing. Chieftaincies were being centralized into domains, and having fewer people in control of large areas led to severe conflict between and amongst the families in power. At the same time, the Norwegian King was gaining more influence among the Icelanders; also the impact of the archbishopric in Niðaróss was becoming serious. The twelfth and

¹⁸ Tables 2 and 3., Genealogy 40.

thirteenth centuries in many European countries were marked by conflict regarding investiture. The division of power between the Church and the lay leaders became a vital issue and led to frequent arguments and Iceland was no exception.¹⁹ The majority of the saints who were recognized by the Roman Church between 1198 and 1431 were bishops. This model gained special popularity in the British Isles and Scandinavia; following the example of Thomas Becket. In every *vita* of that kind there must have been at least a hint of a conflict.²⁰ Describing the actions of the holy prelates, the witnesses usually referred first to the firmness with which they had performed their role as leader of the diocese. As a determined defender of the rights of his church, the good bishop fiercely opposed any attack by a king or any type of lay lord.²¹

Having more responsibility and more influence as a bishop, Guðmundr became involved in disputes with a few powerful chieftains from the Hólar bishopric and the northern quarter, Kolbeinn Tumason (1173–1208) and Sighvatr Sturluson (c. 1170–1238) among them. He was forced to stay away from the bishopric for long periods of time, during which his fame as a holy man grew tremendously. The water consecrated by him became an obligatory item at the homes of the faithful and was used as a remedy in all sorts of difficult illnesses or accidents. Guðmundr healed people, but also provided them with food, often multiplying it in a miraculous way. However, his journeys around the country attracted a lot of beggars and vagrants. That, combined with fear of the revenge of the bishop's opponents,

¹⁹ For the dynamic changes during and at the end of the Commonwealth period see e.g. Gunnar Karlsson, 'Frá þjóðveldi til konungsríkis', in *Saga Íslands*, ed. by Sigurður Línal, 8 vols (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag), II (1975), 1–56; Magnús Stefánsson, 'Kirkjuvald eflist' and *Staðir og Staðamál. Studier i islandske egenkirkelige og beneficalrettslige forhold i middelalderen* (Bergen: Historisk institutt, Universitetet i Bergen, 2000); Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Chieftains and Power in the Icelandic Commonwealth*, trans. by Jean Lundskaer—Nielsen, The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization 12, ed. by Preben Meulengracht Sørensen and Gerd Wolfgang Weber (Odense: Odense University Press, 1999).

²⁰ See the cases of Henrik of Uppsala (d. 1156), Brynjólfr of Skara (1240–1317) and Nikulás of Linköping (d. 1391). Christian Krötzel, *Pilger, Mirakel und Alltag. Formen des Verhaltens im skandinavischen Mittelalter (12.–15. Jahrhundert)*. *Studia historica* 46 (Helsinki: SHS, 1994), 47–98 and André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the later Middle Ages*, trans. by Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 167–73 and 224–25.

²¹ Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 285–310. Vauchez presents the examples of Thomas Cantilupe (d. 1282) and Nikulás of Linköping, and emphasizes such features as the courage and fierceness of this saint type in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries.

made many people refuse to help him. Thanks to the support of other powerful men, such as his cousin Chieftain Ögmundur Þorvarðsson *sneis* (d. 1237), Chieftain Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson (d. 4 March 1213), King Hákon Hákonarson's (k. 1217–1263) retainer Aron Hjörleifsson (d. 1255) and Eyjólfur Kársson (d. 1222), Guðmundr survived all the assaults, though his health deteriorated. A letter dated to 11 May 1237 sent by Pope Gregory IX (pp. 1227–41) to the archbishop of Niðaróss granted Guðmundr permission to resign his office, and another letter of the same date gave him protection in case he decided to continue his episcopal career.²² The letters did not reach Iceland before his death on 16 March 1237. Guðmundr's death and funeral took place at Hólar, and even though he might have spent the last months of his life confined to bed, he was buried with honours, as a bishop.

The phenomenon of Guðmundr's saintliness has not been extensively discussed so far. It became a popular subject of modern research in the second half of the twentieth century, and mainly outside Iceland. A chapter on his cult has been included in Margaret Cormack's doctoral thesis, which studied various means of veneration of native and foreign saints in Iceland from conversion to 1400.²³ The analysis of various aspects of the cult and the extensive use of the information provided by *máldagar* (charters) makes Cormack's study unique among a number of publications that touched on the veneration of Guðmundr or focused solely on the saga material. The book also allows a general comparison of the cult of that particular holy bishop to that of the other two Icelandic saints, as well as to the foreign ones imported to Iceland. Miracles, apparitions and dreams in the medieval narratives about the three Icelandic saints—Jón, Þorlákr and Guðmundr—were discussed in a number of articles. The research has drawn more attention among the scholars to that dimension of Icelandic religious life. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson's publication from 1936 seems to be the only Icelandic article from the first half of the twentieth century that discusses the phenomenon of miracles. Otherwise non-Icelandic scholars in the second half of the twentieth century have been preoccupied with his kind of study.²⁴ Though being very informative, none of the

²² *DI* I, 132. and 133.

²³ Margaret Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland. Their Veneration from the Conversion to 1400*, *Subsidia Hagiographica*, 78 (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes 1994).

²⁴ Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, 'Jarteiknir', *Skírnir* (1936), 23–48; Régis Boyer, 'La vie religieuse en Island (1116–1264) d'après la *Sturlunga saga* et les *Sagas des eveques*'

aforementioned studies presents a thorough, comparative examination of Guðmundr's life and miracles. Neither do the publications analyse the possible reasons for the development (or the process as such) of the cult against the background of the political changes, which is the gap that this study aims to fill.

Icelandic literacy in the Middle Ages has been a vital issue discussed from different angles.²⁵ The analysis of foreign written sources which might have influenced the depiction of dreams, visions and miracles in the lives or miracle books of the native saints has been accompanied by discussion of imported theological ideas and modes of thinking. The authors of articles on those topics and extensive publications on medieval Icelandic literacy have discussed different models of spirituality as represented by hagiographies and the works of the Church Fathers. However, in these publications Guðmundr's life and the veneration of the bishop as a saint have also received some interest, mainly outside Iceland. Such issues as morality, female sexuality, the role of the Virgin Mary and the proclamation of poverty have been discussed thoroughly, but often in reference to selected passages.²⁶ A

(unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Paris, 1972); Margaret Cormack, 'Visions, Demons and Gender in the Sagas of Icelandic Saints', *Collegium Medievale*, 7 (1994/2), 185–209 and 'Sagas of Saints', in *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 42, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000), 302–25; Diane Whaley, 'Miracles in the Sagas of Bishops. Icelandic Variations on an International Theme', *Collegium Medievale* 7 (1994/2), 155–84; Carolyne Larrington, 'Leizla Rannveigar: Gender and politics in the Otherworld vision', *Medium Ævum*, 64/2 (1995), 232–49. Boyer's thesis is a rather thorough and extensive study of the medieval Icelandic religiosity. However, it is limited to the Commonwealth period. Similarly, Margaret Hunt's doctoral thesis provides a thorough analysis of various hagiographical motifs, but focuses largely on those two sources (Margaret Hunt, *A Study of Authorial Perspective in Guðmundar Saga A and Guðmundar Saga D: Hagiography and the Icelandic Bishop's Saga* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International 1986).

²⁵ See the discussion in chapter 1 below.

²⁶ For the discussion of female sexuality and morality see Margaret Cormack "‘Fjölkunnungrí kono scallatu í faðmi sofa’: Sex and the supernatural in Icelandic saints' lives", *Skáldskaparmál* 2 (1992), 221–8, 'Visions, Demons and Gender' and 'Sagas of Saints'; Jenny Jochens, 'The Church and Sexuality in Medieval Iceland', *Journal of Medieval History*, 6 (1980), 377–92, 'Consent in Marriage: Old Norse Law, Life, and Literature', *Scandinavian Studies*, 58 (1986), 142–78 and 'The Illicit Love Visit: An Archaeology of Old Norse Sexuality', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 1 (1991), 357–92, also Whaley, 'Miracles' and Larrington, 'Leizla Rannveigar'. For a brief discussion of literary works (and theological ideas they carried) which might have influenced the depiction of Guðmundr's sanctity in the sagas see Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, 'Að kenna og rita tíða á millum: Um trúarviðhorf Guðmundar Arasonar', *Skáldskaparmál* 2 (1992), 229–38 and Hjalti Hugason, 'Guðmundur Arason: kynlegur

comprehensive study of those issues in all the saga variants aiming at a comparison of the authorial attitudes has not been written so far. Certain episodes from Guðmundr's life and some aspects of his saintliness pointed out by the saga authors who had described those events have been briefly discussed in a few studies devoted mainly to the study of the literary value of the sagas and the manuscripts that contain them.²⁷ Again, however useful and illuminating the discussions are, they do not provide a complete image of the thirteenth and fourteenth-century perception of Guðmundr as a saint.

Medieval Icelandic perception of reality and its depiction in the written record have been examined. The problem of literacy and the study of manuscripts both as artefacts and narratives have dominated the Icelandic scholarship. The structure of different variants of Guðmundr's *vita* and *miracula*, their intra- and intertextual relations as well as the manuscripts have been most thoroughly researched by Stefán Karlsson.²⁸ His approach was, however, strictly philological and the publications focused on the palaeographic, linguistic and literary issues. The literary value and hagiographic character of the bishops' sagas in general have been briefly examined in a few articles.²⁹

kvistur úr röðum Viktorína', *Ritröð Guðfræðistofnunar/Studia Theologica Islandica* 17 (2003), 161–192.

²⁷ Peter Foote, 'Bishop Jörundur Þorsteinsson and the relics of Guðmundr inn góði Arason', in *Studia centennialia in honorem memoriae Benedikt S. Þórarinnsson* (Reykjavík: Typis Ísafoldianis, 1961), 98–114; Marlene Ciklamini, 'The Christian Champion'; 'The Hand of Revision: Abbot Arngrím's Redaction of Guðmundar Saga Biskups', *Gripla*, 8 (1994), 231–52 and 'Sainthood in the Making: The Arduous Path of Guðmundr the Good, Iceland's Uncanonized Saint', *Alvissmál* 2 (2004) 55–74; Régis Boyer, 'Once more, bishop Guðmundr', in *Scandinavia and Christian Europe in the Middle Ages. Papers of the 12th International Saga Conference Bonn/Germany, 28th July–2nd August 2003*, ed. by Rudolf Simek and Judith Meurer (Bonn: Hausdruckerei der Universität Bonn, 2003), 40–4.

²⁸ See e.g. 'Guðmundar Sögur Biskups: Authorial Viewpoints and Methods', *Stafrókar. Ritgerðir eftir Stefán Karlsson gefnar út í tilnefni af sjötugsafmæli hans 2. desember 1998*, ed. by Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1998), 153–71. Stefán Karlsson's contribution to the study of the narratives devoted to Guðmundr is discussed in chapter 1 below.

²⁹ W. P. Ker, 'Gudmund Arason'; Peter Hallberg 'Den sena legendsagan om biskop Guðmundr Arason' (153–60) and 'Sammanfattning om Bergr Sökkasons insats' (161–8) in *Stilsignalement och Författarskap i Norrön Sagalitteratur. Synpunkter och exempel*, ed. by Ture Johannisson, Nordistica Gothoburgensia, 3 (Göteborg 1968), 153–68; Stefán Karlsson 'Grefrun Auðar Djúpúðgu', *Minjar og Menntir. Afmælisrit helgað Kristjáni Eldjárn*, (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfa Menninarsjóðs, 1976), 481–8 and 'Misskilin orð og misrituð í Guðmundar sögum', *Gripla*, 11 (1977), 121–31; J. H. Jørgensen, 'Hagiography and the Icelandic Bishop Sagas' (in his article, however, Guðmundr Arason is barely mentioned, and the same must be said about Fritz

However, the historical context of both the thirteenth- and the fourteenth-century sources on Guðmundr has most often been discussed in relation to the political events from the period of his episcopacy.³⁰ The context of the Icelandic Commonwealth has been of particular importance for the Icelandic scholars. Based on the chosen passages from the saga material, the research (both Icelandic and non-Icelandic, though mainly native) was frequently concluded with rather controversial remarks about the bishop. A good example is the statement that Guðmundr Arason was one of the people chiefly responsible for his country's decadence and final fall.³¹ The bishop has been described as "the most useless in the Icelandic history"³² and declared to have had a "narrow and fanatic mind",³³ while his miracle working was classified as "superstitious".³⁴ An increasing popularity of hagiological studies during the second half of the twentieth century has helped reanalyze many aspects of medieval texts. Also, the research on the Icelandic material, as mentioned above, has been enriched with new perspectives. The presence of folklore in a *vita* and the meaning of the Catholic rituals for the fulfilment of literary and theological conventions have been recognized and included in the discussion of historical individuals. A few brief studies of Guðmundr's life in both historical and hagiographical context have been written, with a clear

Paul's article 'Historiographische und hagiographische Tendenzen in isländischen Bischofsviten des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts', *Skandinavistik* (1979/1), 36–46; Halvard Magerøy, 'Guðmundur góði og Guðmundr ríki. Eit motivsamband', in *Utvalde artiklar av Hallvard Magerøy. Festskrift til Hallvard Magerøy på 75-årsdagen den 15. januar 1991* (Øvre Ervik: Akademisk Forlag, 1991), 16–28.

³⁰ Eiríkur Magnússon, 'The Last of the Icelandic Commonwealth. Part I', *Saga Book* 5 (1906/7), 308–40; Magnús Jónsson, 'Guðmundur biskup góði', *Eimreiðin*, 27 (1921), 172–92 and 'Guðmundur biskup góði' 1941; Flosi Sigurbjörnsson, 'Guðmundur biskup Arason hinn góði og hrun íslenszka þjóðveldsins 1262–64', *Á góðu dægri: afmæliskeðja til Sigurðar Nordals 14. sept. 1951 / frá yngstu nemendum hans*. (Reykjavík: Helgafell, 1951), 78–82; Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga*, 2 vols (Reykjavík: Almenna bókafélagið, 1956), I; Magnús Stefánsson 'Kirkjuvald eflist', Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland. Priests, Power and Social Change 1000–1300* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³¹ Ker has mentioned this accusation as suggested by "some historians" and opposed it himself (Ker, 'Guðmund Arason', pp. 92–3). Jón Jóhannesson has argued for it (*Íslendinga saga*, p. 249), and the statement is still held by certain scholars (Boyer, 'Once more', p. 40).

³² Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga*, p. 250.

³³ Eiríkur Magnússon, 'The Last of the Icelandic Commonwealth', p. 324.

³⁴ This view has been presented mainly by Icelandic scholars, e.g. Benjamin Kristjánsson, 'Guðmundur biskup góði' (p. 356); Magnús Jónsson, 'Guðmundur biskup' 1941, p. 115 and Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga*, p. 250.

attempt at keeping the two in balance.³⁵ They are, however, too general to analyze the phenomenon of his sanctity and are based usually solely on the narrative sources.

The problem of a cult construction which is addressed by this study cannot be discussed without taking the political events into consideration. Certainly, to a large extent, “the events dictate the frame” here.³⁶ However, they are used as a background, and the accuracy of the descriptions should not be taken as historical truth in the way it is understood by modern historians. What is of the utmost importance here is the authorial depiction (and perception) of the events and Guðmundr’s role in them, an extensive study of the saint’s life and miracles as depicted by the extant written sources. In my view, a thorough analysis of the perception of his saintliness may prove valuable for modern understanding of the medieval Icelandic mentality in general and also the historiographical records.³⁷ R. N. Swanson writes, “The relationship between [...] living saints and their societies was complex and tense: that they were recognized meant that they were perceived as providing something needed by their contemporaries”.³⁸ Recognition did not always lead to canonization (as Guðmundr’s example shows), but as long as veneration of a saint was widely known and recorded in many sources, it meant that the figure considered a saint was needed for some reason. The present discussion is trying to deduce who exactly decided that Guðmundr was needed as a saint in Iceland and why. Can we talk about the same criteria in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries? Who and what might have established them? Finally, to what extent does the amount of hagiographical material really reflect Guðmundr’s popularity among his contemporaries, as modern research has suggested?

³⁵ Gunnar F. Guðmundsson, ‘Guðmundur Arason og samtíð hans’, in *Kristni á Íslandi. Íslenskt samfélag og Rómakirkja*, 4 vols. (Reykjavík: Alþingi 2000), II, 48–52 (being the most thorough study), Régis Boyer, ‘L’évêque Guðmundur Arason, témoin de son temps’, *Etudes Germaniques* (1967), 427–44. There are early publications that put Guðmundr’s sanctity quite a lot in focus (e.g. Magnús Jónsson, ‘Guðmundur biskup’ 1921 and 1941). However, they have been written for church periodicals and the perspective is rather biased.

³⁶ Thomas Heffernan. *Sacred Biography: Saints and their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

³⁷ The word “perception” is referred to in this context as both the authorial attitude and the attitude of different social groups as depicted by the authors.

³⁸ R. N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215–c. 1515* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 152.

“Of the Icelandic bishops subsequently considered saints, Guðmundr Arason was probably the only one who enjoyed a reputation for sanctity during his lifetime”, writes M. Cormack.³⁹ The concept of Guðmundr’s “popularity”, however, needs clarification. Particular scholars concentrate on different aspect. Certain statements underline general respect for Guðmundr as an individual and clergyman.⁴⁰ The discussion of political conditions in medieval Iceland often highlights his relationship with particular social groups, especially chieftains. As mentioned above, the best known motifs are Guðmundr’s positive relationship with the poor and his arguments with the powerful laymen. Finally, there is the question of him being “popular” as a saint. The idea of Guðmundr’s “popularity” as a saint among his contemporaries has often been based not solely on the number of written sources concerning him. It has also been associated with the great number of landmarks bearing his name (especially the wells, *Gvendarbrunnar*). W. P. Ker writes, “Those who knew him, loved him” that Guðmundr’s “popular fame” survived “to the present day”.⁴¹ However, such an approach is misleading as the form “Gvendur” appears in the written evidence only in the sixteenth century. Few landmarks bearing the name of Guðmundr are recorded in documents (none of them being a well or a spring) from the period under consideration (or later), and not all place names of sites reportedly consecrated by the saint are mentioned in the sagas. The narrative sources provide a convincing image of Guðmundr’s reputation as a holy man and great popularity even during his priesthood, and of the posthumous veneration of him as a saint. However, other types of written sources do not support the idea of an extensive cult in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The book discusses different aspects of Guðmundr’s sanctity, with the focus on the authorial perspective and type as well as context of the written source. However, as far as the narratives are concerned, the technical details of composition and form are not of primary interest, but rather the message the texts convey. The discussion is divided into eight chapters. The first addresses the source material and such problems as dating, the establishment of genre, provenance or authorship. The six following chapters are devoted to Guðmundr’s life and

³⁹ Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 99.

⁴⁰ “Yes, he was popular indeed [...] not exclusively with small people” (Boyer, ‘Once again’, p. 42).

⁴¹ Ker, ‘Gudmund Arason’, p. 90.

miracles; they examine the way different stages of his life were depicted in the contemporary sagas as well as the younger *biskupa sögur*. The historicity of events and individuals mentioned is juxtaposed in those sources with hagiographic patterns modelled on the *vitae* imported from abroad. Chapters two and three concern the formative years of the saint. His family ties, the role of Guðmundr's parents, and childhood in medieval Iceland are in focus in chapter two. It aims to establish the extent to which Guðmundr has been portrayed as an ordinary, medieval child/teenager, a representative of the Commonwealth era, and a saint.

The third chapter examines the crucial moments of the initial stage of Guðmundr's clerical career. The presence of the two most influential individuals in his life at the time has been discussed in order to clarify the authorial ability to construct the image of Priest Guðmundr *góði*. It was during this period of time that the turning points which changed his conduct took place, and without paying attention to it, the years of his episcopacy, which have been the main focus of many scholars, cannot be fully understood.

Several aspects of Guðmundr's priesthood and his much debated episcopacy are the subject of analysis in the fourth and fifth chapters, the main ones being his miracle working and relationship with powerful laymen. The details of political changes in the northern quarter and the bishop's involvement in numerous arguments are not of primary concern. Instead, they serve as a background to the discussion of his steadily more advanced miracle working and charisma as well as his growing devotion to the Virgin Mary and a particular relationship with other saints, which are the subject of chapter 6. The sixth chapter discusses also the role of women as the saint's friends and as intermediaries of messages concerning Guðmundr's saintliness.

Chapters seven and eight concentrate to a greater extent on Guðmundr's posthumous fame. They combine the information from the sagas with that included in the annals, charters and laws. Chapter seven discusses the often quoted assumption that Guðmundr associated mainly with the poor and outcasts, especially during his episcopacy. The context of various situations is examined: different types of followers and companions who joined Guðmundr on his journeys around the country, as well as the recipients of rescue miracles (*in vita* and *post mortem*) are examined in order to clarify that issue. Since charity and almsgiving formed the basis of religious life in the Middle Ages, regulations and laws concerning the poor in laws and charters as

well as donations are examined in order to supplement the information from annals and sagas.

The eighth chapter is mainly concerned with Guðmundr's posthumous fame and the central part of the discussion concentrates on his relics, the *translatio* and all the recorded exhumations. It analyses the historical role of four Hólar bishops, three of them Norwegian, and their initiative to draw the public attention to Guðmundr's bodily remains. The chapter adds the conclusion to the analysis of his cult, discussing the fate of the relics and the posthumous miracle stories. It examines the active proclamation of Guðmundr's sainthood by the bishops on one hand and the composition of the elaborate four variants of his *vita* in the fourteenth century on the other.

The book does not claim to have created a full and consistent image of Guðmundr's saintliness as, bearing in mind the variety and incompleteness of the source material, provenance and time of composition, such a task is hardly possible. Notwithstanding, its goal is to discuss the largest amount possible of written evidence that might reveal certain details of the medieval Icelandic perception of Guðmundr as a saint. To what extent the texts demonstrate only authorial and to what extent "popular" (that is, public, common) perception of his saintliness is a question that will have to remain open. The learned scribes were the representatives of their decades and should be considered as such, although their view is certainly predominant over that represented by lower layers of the society. Although the medieval Icelandic society was far from being idealistically egalitarian, the upper echelons of it (including the monastic circles) were not completely isolated from the other groups.⁴² Thus, the description of the supernatural events such as prophetic dreams or visions, the context and variety of miracles, the depiction of Guðmundr's behaviour, attitudes or practices should provide the image of the medieval Icelandic religiousness.

The biographers and compilers of the *biskupa sögur* have portrayed every prelate as a holy man, and distinguishing Jón, Þorlákr and Guðmundr as men holier than others must have had reasons and

⁴² The establishment of this kind of relationship has always caused debates. Jacques LeGoff and Jean Claude Schmitt were perhaps too categorical in defining a clear boundary between the literate, authoritative clergy and the illiterate, subordinate peasants. Thomas Heffernan, however, makes a too farfetched assumption in stating that the author for sacred biography is the community and "the experience presented by the narrative voice is collective" (Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, pp. 19–20).

required considerable effort. Holiness was synonymous with more than average piety, and prophetic dreams and signs also were attributed to a large number of laymen in the contemporary sagas. This research attempts to establish the necessary features that might have been expected from Guðmundr as a saint: miracles, relics or the likeness to great examples such as Ambrose, Nicholas or Martin. The way those features were adapted to the Icelandic conditions in particular decades is under examination here. The comparison of his saintliness to that of Jón and Þorlákr, but also to the foreign models, places him in the Icelandic context and adds an international, universal dimension to the veneration of that individual. Furthermore, the study shows how familiar clerical circles in Iceland were with European trends and how well they were able to use that knowledge.

CHAPTER ONE

THE SOURCE MATERIAL

“[...] it is the *perception* we are documenting”.¹

In a paper devoted to the study of saintliness, Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker included the following statement: “All genres that have saints as their subject are hagiographic sources”.² Hagiography is, indeed, not one genre but genres, and in many cases the nature of the genre is “far from obvious”.³ Very often before a hagiographer would begin to write the story about a saint, facts from that saint’s life (‘facts’ being events and dates as transmitted by witnesses and various sources, not necessarily historically established facts as modern society understands it) were already undergoing changes in other texts concerning that individual. The construction of a cult was a complex and dynamic process which involved different types of records, including those whose primary destination was not the glorification of pious men and women. This shows that the genre dominated the subject matter of texts only to a certain extent. The authors and copyists as well as the potential recipients and users of the texts had the main impact on the content and dictated the standards.

Hagiographies provide quite a lot of information about the perspective of the author and about the potential addressees of the texts. The potential addressees might be as difficult to establish as the potential initiators of a cult. Unless a specific aim of composing a narrative

¹ Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society. The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000–1700* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 9. See also Delahaye’s classification of hagiographical texts in his study of legends Hippolyte Delahaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, trans. by Donald Attwater (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), pp. 86–98.

² Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, ‘The invention of saintliness: texts and contexts’, in *The Invention of Saintliness*, ed. by Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker. Routledge Studies in Medieval Religion and Culture, ed. by George Ferzoco and Carolyn Muessig (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 3–23 (p. 18).

³ Delahaye, p. 51. See also Thomas Head, ‘Introduction’, in *Medieval Hagiography. An Anthology*, ed. by Thomas Head (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), xiii–xxxviii. Weinstein and Bell have also discussed the general use of the adjective “hagiographical” in modern research (Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, pp. 14–5).

is mentioned (such as papal canonization) the audience may be “the community of belief, whether that community is many or one” as Thomas Heffernan has pointed out.⁴ Whether it is one individual such as a monarch or an ecclesiastical authority who has commissioned the text, or a larger group of faithful who will read or hear the story, they might dictate certain standards by knowing some facts or believing in a specific set of values. In such cases the author depends largely on the audience as ‘experts’.

As mentioned above, the hagiographer’s clerical status did not altogether isolate him from his lay roots or from the experiences of the society around him. Therefore, hagiography can be used for incidental historical information, but it can and must be a good source for the study of social values. Yet putting the primary focus on sources other than the proper *vitae*, and concentrating solely on the societies in which the saints were sanctified can be misleading in an analysis of a cult, as Patrick Geary pointed out.⁵ *Vitae* ought to be examined in relation to the other texts with which they were associated, read or gathered, and not only in relation either to general views of Christian perfection or to other contemporary hagiographic texts.⁶

1.1. *Saints’ lives in Iceland*

The beginnings of hagiographic writing in medieval Icelandic literature are not very well known. The author of the *First Grammatical Treatise* has mentioned *helgar þýðingar* among the writings that were available to him. The meaning of the word *þýðing* has been discussed in numerous publications, and it has been suggested that it should be interpreted as “explanation” or “exposition”.⁷ Such an interpretation seems to be the most suitable one as the author of the *Treatise*

⁴ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 19.

⁵ Patrick Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 17.

⁶ Geary, *Living with the Dead*, p. 20.

⁷ See e.g. Peter Hallberg, ‘Imagery in religious Old Norse prose literature. An outline’, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 102 (1987), 401–21 (p. 401); Hreinn Benediktsson, [Norræn stafræði] *The first grammatical treatise: introduction, text, notes, translation, vocabulary, facsimiles*, ed. by Hreinn Benediktsson. *Publications in linguistics* 1 (Reykjavík: University of Iceland, 1972), pp. 182–3; Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas. Iceland’s Medieval Literature* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag 1997), esp. p. 127.

most probably referred to translations or paraphrases of imported religious material, *e.g.* homilies. Saints' lives translated into Old Norse are another, although much debated, possibility.⁸

Little is known about hagiographic writings in Latin composed in Iceland and not much has survived. As far as the native saints are concerned, at the beginning of the thirteenth century Gunnlaugr Leifsson (d. 1219), the monk at Þingeyrar, composed a Latin *vita* of Jón Ögmundarson and wrote up some apparitions concerning Þorlákr Þórhallsson, most probably in Latin. There are also a few Latin fragments containing material about Þorlákr, some of which is also recorded in the extant saga about him. Complete *vitae* exist only in the vernacular and the precise establishment of the relationship between those and the lost Latin ones is only speculation.⁹ It is not known when the first translations of the lives of foreign saints were made, but it was possibly during the twelfth century. The oldest extant Icelandic manuscripts containing prose narratives include lives of saints, translated from Latin. Without doubt the oldest saints' lives in Icelandic preceded the first sagas.¹⁰ One of theories concerning the development of hagiographic writing in Norway/Iceland suggests two stages: before the middle of the thirteenth century when the authors usually followed the Latin versions rather closely, and after the middle of the thirteenth century when fewer translations seem to have been made. Instead, existing translations were expanded with pious comment and often rewritten in the so-called "florid style".¹¹

The sagas of Ambrose and Thomas Becket may have been intended to carry political messages in the struggle for the control of Icelandic churches, and these sources were certainly not the only ones written with that intention. Although such considerations may have influenced

⁸ Jónas Kristjánsson argues that the Grammarian referred to the oldest translations of saints' lives, some of which are extant in the oldest manuscripts (*Eddas and Sagas*, pp. 127–9).

⁹ Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, pp. 32–3. Saints' lives or their fragments are also to be found in narratives other than their own sagas, many being subjects of *exempla*—for a further discussion of the imported saints in medieval Icelandic hagiographic literature see Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, pp. 31–39.

¹⁰ Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas*, pp. 135 and 181. *Heilagra Manna Sögur* came into being in considerable numbers in the latter part of the twelfth century.

¹¹ Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas*, pp. 138–9. The changes he refers to concern style, vocabulary, and, to some extent, the choice of the subject matter. Some of the translations of the imported *vitae* were made in Norway, but a number of them are attributed to Icelandic monks and priests (Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 33).

translators in a small percentage of cases, most of the sagas were clearly translated for use by the Church. Margaret Cormack's research reveals that nearly all saints whose feasts were obligatory, and eighty percent of those mentioned in church charters, are the subject of a saga or at least a chapter in another work.¹² It is difficult to estimate the relative popularity of individual saints on the basis of the number of manuscripts containing their sagas as the evidence that has survived to our times is most probably only a small part of what once existed.¹³ What the extant manuscripts do suggest is that the existence of a saga about a saint does not necessarily reflect the saint's veneration by the laity, but rather his or her importance to the teachings of the Church. This view, as the following chapters will reveal, can also be applied to Guðmundr's case.

1.2. *Sagas*

CONTEMPORARY SAGAS.¹⁴ Among the oldest sources on Guðmundr Arason that constitute the basis for the four variants of *vita* are two sagas included in the *Sturlunga saga* compilation, being, at the same time, contemporary sagas. There are two MS versions of *Sturlunga saga*: *Króksfjarðarbók* (AM 122a fol.; written 1360–70) and *Reykfjarðarbók* (AM 122b fol.; written c. 1400).¹⁵ *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða* presents the saint's life from birth till the beginning of the journey to Norway where he went in order to be consecrated as bishop of Hólar in 1203. Written shortly after Guðmundr's death, presumably in the 1240s, it is preserved only as parts of *Guðmundar sögur* and abridged in *Sturlunga saga*. The version included in *Sturlunga saga* differs from *Prestssaga* preserved in *Resensbók* (AM 399 4to), which is called *Elzta saga* ("the

¹² Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 37.

¹³ Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 38.

¹⁴ For the discussion of *Sturlunga saga* as a source see e.g. Jón Jóhannesson, 'Um *Sturlunga Sögu*', in *Sturlunga Saga*, 2 vols., ed. by Jóhannesson and others (Reykjavík: Sturlunguútgáfan, 1946), II, vii–lvi.

¹⁵ Neither of these two MSS has preserved the text in its original form, see e.g. Björn Magnússon Ólsen, *Um Sturlungu* (Copenhagen: S. L. Møller, 1897), 195–205; Kristian Kålund, 'Króksfjarðarbók', in *Sturlunga saga efter Membranen Kroksfjardarbok: udfyldt efter Reykjarfjardarbok, udgiven af Det Kongelige Nordiske Oldskrift-selskab*, ed. by Kristian Kålund, 2 vols (Copenhagen and Christiania: Gylendalske Boghandel/Nordisk Forlag, 1906–11), ii–xxxii and 'Reykjarfjarðarbók', in *Sturlunga saga efter Membranen Kroksfjardarbok*, xxxii–xlii.

oldest saga"). It is difficult to give an exact date of its composition; Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon have suggested 1212–1220.¹⁶ Many miracles and religious motifs included in *Elzta saga* have been omitted in the *Sturlunga saga* version.¹⁷ However, *GA* (discussed below) has used *Elzta saga* as the principal source on Guðmundr's priesthood and, as it has been suggested by Stefán Karlsson, aside from the annalistic additions and three interpolations from *Íslendinga saga*, *Elzta saga* forms the basis for *GA* chapters 1–114.¹⁸ As far as the authorship of *Prestssaga* is concerned, Abbot Lambkárr Þorgilsson (of Staðarhólmenn, d. 1249), the bishop's follower, is the most probable candidate.¹⁹ Whether he could be considered the author of *Elzta saga*, the variant included in *Sturlunga saga* compilation, or both, is uncertain.

The absence of the religious motifs from *Elzta saga* in the *Sturlunga saga* version does not influence the image of Guðmundr's saintliness in a negative way.²⁰ Therefore *Prestssaga* used in the present discussion is the one from *Sturlunga saga* compilation. The comparison of its portrayal of Guðmundr's saintliness with that found in *GA* and other *Guðmundar sögur* is particularly interesting because of its relationship to other sagas concerning the saint and classified as contemporary sagas: *Íslendinga saga*, *Arons saga* and *Hrafn's saga*, which are included in the discussion.

¹⁶ 'Formáli', in *Biskupa Sögur*, 2 vols., ed. by Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon (Copenhagen: Íslenzka bókmentafélag, 1858–78), I, v–xc, p. lxi.

¹⁷ See e.g. Björn Magnússon Ólsen, *Um Sturlungu*, pp. 272–304, Stefán Karlsson, 'Introduction', in *Guðmundar sögur biskups. Ævi Guðmundar biskups, Guðmundar saga A*, ed. by Stefán Karlsson (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Forlag, 1993), v–clxxxvii.

¹⁸ Stefán Karlsson, 'Introduction', pp. cxliv–clxvi, esp. pp. cl–cliii. In *GA*, *GB* and *GC* (where it is also preserved), the saga ends in the middle of the description of Guðmundr's consecration journey and it is possible that the original *Prestssaga*, of which *Elzta saga* is supposedly the most original form, ended this way.

¹⁹ Genealogy 22. His authorship has been suggested by Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon in their edition of *Biskupa sögur* and is still considered the closest possibility ('Formáli', pp. lix–lx; see also Stefán Karlsson, 'Guðmundar sögur biskups', p. 155. It is not known which monastery he could have been linked to, and Orri Vésteinsson has suggested that Lambkárr's title was honorary (*The Christianization of Iceland* 2000, p. 216).

²⁰ As Úlfar Bragason has suggested ('Sturlunga's text of *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða*', in *Scandinavia and Christian Europe in the Middle Ages. Papers of the 12th International Saga Conference Bonn/Germany, 28th July–2nd August 2003*, ed. by Rudolf Simek and Judith Meurer (Bonn: Hausdruckerei der Universität Bonn, 2003), 483–90.

Íslendinga saga is the chief source for Guðmundr's episcopal career. Interestingly enough, it begins with Guðmundr's consecration, that is, nearly exactly where *Prestssaga* ends. *Íslendinga saga* is the major contemporary source for the political history of Iceland and it is indeed an advantage that such a large part of it has been devoted to Guðmundr. It is not a coincidence that the author of the saga is Chieftain Sturla Þórðarson (1116–1284), a member of one of the most powerful chiefly families, and a nephew of Snorri Sturluson (c. 1179–1241). Communication (and consultation) between Lambkárr Porgilsson and Sturla Þórðarson was possible, although it is difficult to say with certainty how much of Lambkárr's knowledge the chieftain used in his composition.²¹ Sturla's authorship of the entire saga and his enthusiastic attitude towards Guðmundr has been questioned, as it has been suggested that another, clerical author was responsible for the passages honouring the bishop.²² Nevertheless, the chieftain still remains the most likely candidate.

Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar from about 1230, tells the story of a chieftain and physician, who in 1213 was killed by his opponent Þorvaldr Snorrason (d. 1228).²³ The saga was composed by a contemporary admirer of Hrafn, shortly after Þorvaldr's death.²⁴ Although Guðmundr is not the main character here, the author devoted many passages to him as Hrafn belonged to his close allies, and even accompanied the bishop-elect on his consecration trip to Norway. This source is the oldest one with some significance for the research on Guðmundr's life and veneration.

²¹ Lambkárr's death in 1249 was accepted as an explanation for the fact that the saga remained unfinished and ends in the middle of the consecration journey to Norway. Sturla must have known Guðmundr in person, as Stefán Karlsson has suggested, pointing out that in the winter of 1227–8, when the bishop stayed with Þórðr at Hvammr, Sturla was fourteen years old (Stefán Karlsson, 'Guðmundar sögur biskups', p. 156).

²² Anton Zimmerling, 'Bishop Guðmundr in Sturla Þórðarson's *Íslendinga Saga*: The Cult of Saints or the Cult of Personalities?', in *Scandinavia and Christian Europe in the Middle Ages. Papers of The 12th International Saga Conference Bonn/Germany, 28th July-2nd August 2003*, ed. by Rudolf Simek and Judith Meurer (Bonn: Hausdruckerei der Universität Bonn, 2003), 557–67.

²³ Genealogy 27.

²⁴ The compiler has used only the latter part of the saga which is elsewhere preserved in its entirety. For the discussion of the numerous manuscripts, text variants and potential authorship see Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, 'Introduction', in *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, ed. by Guðrún P. Helgadóttir (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), xi–cxvi.

A saga devoted to the life of another ally of Guðmundr, *Arons saga Hjörleifssonar*, is dated to around 1340. It is not to be found in the *Sturlunga saga* compilation itself, but has much in common with its contents, and thus is sometimes included in modern editions. Guðrún Nordal has suggested that the saga may have been written “in the wake of the interest in having Bishop Guðmundr canonized around 1320.”²⁵ Aron Hjörleifsson has been depicted as a faithful supporter of Guðmundr in his arguments with Chieftain Sturla Sighvatsson (1199–1238), and also one of the famous warriors of his time. He allegedly made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and died in Norway as an honoured member of King Hákon’s retinue. The text of the saga has had to be reconstructed from an early fifteenth century vellum fragment (AM 551dβ 4to), from seventeenth century paper copies (AM 212 fol. and AM 426 fol.), and *Codex Resenianus* (AM 399 4to).²⁶

The contemporary sagas are valuable sources that provide information about the socio-political changes Iceland underwent in the period under consideration. They are considered to be reliable evidence as the distance between the events they describe and the time when they were written down is c. 20–70 years, which is considered a relatively short span of time.²⁷ For the research on the construction of Guðmundr Arason’s cult *Prestssaga* is of utmost importance, especially since the assumption that its author was indeed Lambkarr Þorgilsson means that it is the first hand account on the perception of Guðmundr Arason by an individual who knew him rather well. Also significant is *Íslendinga saga*, because of its relation to *GP*, as well as the fact that a significant part of that saga (considered the main source on the history of the Icelandic Commonwealth) is devoted to Guðmundr. This particular source must already have gained a high esteem as a valid historical document in the thirteenth century as the authors of the *biskupa sögur* have suggested a close friendship between Chieftain Þórðr Sturluson (1165–1237), the father of the author, and the saint. Guðmundr’s close relationship with the leading chieftains also formed an important basis for the construction of his sainthood. As mentioned above, without

²⁵ Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy, The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), p. 114.

²⁶ See e.g. Jón Jóhannesson and others, ‘Introduction’, pp. xlix–li and John Porter, ‘Some aspects of Arons saga Hjörleifssonar’, *Saga Book* 18 (1970), 136–66.

²⁷ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Chieftains and Power*, p. 18.

the contemporary sagas the *Guðmundar sögur* would not have been able to gain the significance and “reliability” they did.

Prestssaga and *Íslendinga saga* can be and have been approached this way. *Prestssaga* in *Sturlunga saga* compilation can be classified as a contemporary saga and a hagiography. The saga presents facts in a seemingly objective, annalistic way, but signs and wonderful events as well as the spreading of Guðmundr’s *fama sanctitatis* are carefully noted, although the variant is abridged in comparison to *Elzta saga*. *Íslendinga saga* is a source of the same type, historiographic and hagiographic, whose author (authors?) did not hesitate to allude to the bishop’s sanctity and close the part devoted to Guðmundr with the word *Amen*. The fourteenth century variants of Guðmundr’s *vita*, however, constitute another type of evidence which has been treated by many historians with much more caution. The reason has been the later time of composition, the contents—a decisively greater number of miraculous events—as well as a much more didactic character than that of the contemporary sagas.

BISHOPS’ SAGAS are stories about Icelandic bishops from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson’s theory that the first *biskupa saga* is that about the first Icelandic holy bishop, Þorlákr, has been recently accepted by the majority of scholars.²⁸ Bishops’ sagas were written down from around 1200 until the middle of the fourteenth century and many of them were composed by contemporaries of the bishops.²⁹ There is a tendency to divide *biskupa sögur* into two categories: saints’ lives (the sagas about Þorlákr, Jón and Guðmundr) and “historical” works. However, many of the “historical” sagas, which could be considered historical works (such as *Árna saga* or *Lárentíus saga*), are influenced in style and structure by the hagiographies.³⁰ Therefore, the division between the two should not be that radical. The genre of bishops’ sagas has been debated from many angles; certain scholars have expressed doubts whether *þættir* and sagas should be classified in one group.³¹ However, since too many studies prove

²⁸ Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ‘Bemerkninger om de eldste islandske bispesagaer’, *Studia Islandica*, 17 (Reykjavík: Heimsspekkideild Háskóla Íslands, 1958), 27–37.

²⁹ Guðbrandur Vígfússon, ‘Formáli’, v–xc.

³⁰ Ásdís Egilsdóttir, ‘Eru biskupasögur til?’, in *Skáldskaparmál* 2 (1992), 207–20.

³¹ Hunt, *A Study of Authorial Perspective*, pp. 37–40.

that hagiography can be represented by many genres, that issue does not seem to be relevant any more.

The fourteenth century versions of Guðmundr's *vita* are historiographic and hagiographic on different levels. *GA*, written most likely around 1320–1330, is a compilation of *Prestssaga*, *Hrafn saga*, *Íslendinga saga*, *Arons saga* and annals and contains only a few original sentences from the compiler himself. The chief MS, AM 399 4to (ca. 1330–1350), is deficient, but the gaps, except at the end, can be filled from a later copy. Stefán Karlsson wrote, "The compiler of *GA* did not intend to write a saint's life" and argued that even in the part describing Guðmundr's life as a bishop "there is practically none of the praise of the holy man that could be expected".³² Those statements are rather difficult to accept, since virtually all the sagas listed by Karlsson as *GA*'s sources are rich in allusions to the bishop's holiness. The presence of numerous annalistic entries and extensive passages concerning family ties may have been added in order to provide certain credibility to the events described, but certainly does not diminish the hagiographical dimension of *GA*.

GB, dated to c. after 1320, is longer and called the "Middle saga" (*miðsaga*). It is a compilation of the three first mentioned sources of *GA*, interpolated with some additional material and authorial comment; at the end, the miracle book was added (both the *in vita* and *post mortem* miracles). Also *GB* has been claimed to represent "an unsuccessful attempt to write a saint's life about Bishop Guðmundur" because its style is not consistent and the structure not very well planned.³³ Nevertheless the author/compiler has included some interesting passages which are not to be found in *GA*, such as Guðmundr's conversation with the Norwegian archbishop, including the saint's lecture about the consecration of water. Those passages have strongly hagiographical character and the weak structure of the saga does not seem to diminish it. The chief MS, AM 657c 4to (ca. 1350), is deficient, and only the missing end of the miracle book can be supplied from other MSS.

GC was written around 1320–1345. It is based upon *GB* and/or mainly the same sources together with some additional partly written material and preserved in deficient seventeenth century MSS, the main

³² Stefán Karlsson, 'Guðmundar sögur biskups', p. 159.

³³ Stefán Karlsson, 'Guðmundar sögur biskups', p. 161.

being Stock. papp. 4, 4to. Contrary to the compilers of *GA* and *GB*, who copied their thirteenth-century sources, written in classical saga style without many alterations, the author of *GC* produced a consistent style by rewriting his sources according to a new taste, and rearranged the material, thus succeeding in writing a saint's life of a confessor, and placing the miracles dated to certain periods of time according to that chronology. Thus, the reader is constantly reminded from the first chapter that the main character of the saga is a holy man: first a *vita* is presented, and then *miracula post mortem*. *GC* has been ascribed to a known author of saints' lives, the Benedictine monk Bergr Sokkason (d. circa 1350). It is found only in deficient seventeenth century copies, and the text has not been edited, except for the last preserved chapters. In a poem, the author of version *GD*, Arngrímr, mentions that Bergr Sokkason had written about Guðmundr and it is possible that the text in Stock. papp.4, 4to represents his work.³⁴ It is interesting to note that there is an assumption that this variant might have contained an account of the translation of Guðmundr's relics in 1315, which otherwise is only to be found in annals.³⁵

GD The last and longest *Guðmundar saga* was written around 1350 by the Benedictine monk Arngrímr (Brandsson). The principle source was version C, but Arngrímr reworked his material thoroughly, not only by adding new miracles and his own glosses, but also by omitting material that he did not find appropriate for the saint's image. The composition and especially the style have been altered and made still more florid than in *GC*. *GD* is preserved in several MSS that can be divided between two almost contemporary versions. The oldest MS, Stock. Perg. fol. no. 5 (ca. 1350–1360), represents a complete text of the less original version, containing many verses written by the author himself. *GD* was most probably written with a foreign audience in mind as an attempt to acquire a papal canonization of Bishop Guðmundr, but no Latin version has been found, although it has been suggested that one existed.³⁶ The oldest MS of Arngrímr's saga con-

³⁴ Finnur Jónsson saw this interpretation as a misunderstanding and maintained that the bishop mentioned in the verse was in fact Nicholas, whose saga is Bergr's work, which was criticized by Peter Hallberg who has also suggested that Bergr had translated his saga into Latin (Hallberg, 'Sammanfattning', pp. 159–60).

³⁵ Stefán Karlsson, 'Guðmundar sögur biskups', p. 163.

³⁶ Björn Magnússon Ólsen presented the view that *GD* was an Icelandic translation of a Latin *vita* (Björn Magnússon Ólsen, *Um Sturlungu*, pp. 2–3). Peter Hallberg and Hallvard Magerøy have accepted his view (Hallberg, 'Den sena legendsagan';

tains several new miracles, including one from 1343, and the story of Guðmundr's life has been remodelled to resemble that of Thomas Becket, whose saga Arngrímr may also have translated. Other sources that have inspired Arngrímr were: Gregory's *Dialogues*, and *Speculum Historiale* by Vincent de Beauvais.³⁷

None of the longer works concerning Guðmundr Arason was written before his death. It is also unlikely that any *Guðmundar saga* covering the bishop's whole life was written before the first exhumation of his relics in 1315. The four surviving sagas are different mainly in style and structure, and the designation *A B C D* suggested by Stefán Karlsson (and used in the present study) does not refer to the order in which they were written down. It implies an assessment of how far they are removed from their principal sources.³⁸ The authors compiled the information from the contemporary sagas and reworked them in order to produce a hagiography in accordance with the Icelandic saga tradition. The motifs borrowed from the imported hagiographic material available to the scribes allowed them to compose texts that fitted the Western European canon. It has been suggested that another issue that may have caused the composition and revision of hagiographic works in general was the struggle between ecclesiastical and secular power in Iceland.³⁹ *Guðmundar sögur* could certainly serve as an illustration of this theory.

One more characteristic feature of those narratives must be mentioned. As Margaret Cormack has observed, "when the extant saints' sagas are compared with secular ones, two characteristic features of sagas set in Iceland or Scandinavia will be found lacking: genealogies and poetry".⁴⁰ In contrast with Jón and Þorlákr, the sagas about

Magerøy, 'Guðmundr góði'). Stefán Karlsson, on the other hand, has presented a sceptical approach towards this theory (Stefán Karlsson, 'Guðmundar sögur biskups', pp. 168–9).

³⁷ Stefán Karlsson, 'Icelandic Lives of Thomas à Becket: Questions of Authorship', in *Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference, University of Edinburgh, 1971*, ed. by Peter Foote, Hermann Pálsson, and Desmond Slay (London: The Viking Society for Northern Research University College, 1973), 212–43 (pp. 233–4), and 'Guðmundar Sögur Biskups', p. 167. See also Ciklamini, 'The Hand of Revision' and Maurer, K., 'Der Elisabeth von Schönau Visionen nach einer isländischen Quelle', *Aus den Sitzungsberichten der philos.-philol. u. histor. Classe der k. bayer. Akad. Der Wiss.* 1883. Heft III. Sitzung vom 7. Juli 1883, 401–33.

³⁸ Stefán Karlsson, 'Guðmundar sögur biskups', p. 158.

³⁹ Cormack, 'Sagas of Saints', p. 308.

⁴⁰ Cormack, 'Sagas of Saints', pp. 309–10.

Guðmundr are rich in both, like other, “secular” Icelandic sagas. Stefán Karlsson has suggested that the saint’s relatives had played a part in the composition of the narratives.⁴¹ In his opinion, it is particularly noticeable in the miracle book, *GA* and *GB*, and the argument is based on the phrase “vér [...] vinir ok frændr Guðmundar biskups”.⁴² I find it hard to agree with that hypothesis; the use of words “friend” and “relative” in the narratives concerning Guðmundr, as well as in the medieval Icelandic sources in general, did not always correspond with actual blood relationships, as shall be discussed below.⁴³ In my view they refer mainly to the bishop’s supporters, and it is quite significant that many authors and contributors are listed by names in different variants. Certainly, a medieval hagiography would often describe a saint’s parentage, especially if the work was composed under the patronage of the family.⁴⁴ It is quite understandable that “Icelanders were happy to enshrine the saints themselves in their genealogical literature as individuals with whom kinship would gladly be recognized”.⁴⁵ A sentence mentioning their initiative would be quite a strong statement as well. But I find the anonymity of Guðmundr’s “relatives” rather difficult to explain in this case.

1.3. Jarteinabók

Guðmundr’s *Miracle Book* consists of two parts that are rather different. As far as the first one is concerned, some chapters must have been written as an appendix to Sturla Þórðarson’s *Íslendinga saga*, as many references to it are visible in numerous paragraphs. This part is not a standard miracle book (*miracula*), as there are numerous descriptions of journeys between the miracle stories. The other part of the *jarteinabók* is different as it consists exclusively of miracles that took place after Guðmundr’s death, which is a more traditional record of *post mortem* miracles.

⁴¹ Stefán Karlsson, ‘Guðmundar sögur biskups’, pp. 157 and 161.

⁴² *GB*, ch. 85.

⁴³ See especially 7.2.1. and 7.2.2.

⁴⁴ Goodich, *Vita perfecta*, pp. 82–3.

⁴⁵ Cormack, ‘Sagas of Saints’, p. 311. The author also refers to the interpolations in *Landnámabók* concerning the ancestry of Jón and Þorlákr.

Standard medieval miracle books served different purposes.⁴⁶ The stories of miracles which were kept at shrines focused on the individuals who experienced the events. Such collections were rarely copied and usually existed in the book kept at the shrine, or at most in a few copies made for particular purposes. They were a part of the furnishings of the shrine, and, thus, had a status similar to that of a relic. Certain collections were copied for liturgical use and had, therefore, a wider circulation. This was the case with the miracles of saints who were included in the calendar of the church and had a feast day in more than one place, where material was needed for public reading. By the end of the twelfth century the miracles of newly deceased saints were usually recorded in the form of legal briefs for the purpose of applying for official canonization. The *vitae* of the saints were sometimes followed by selections of posthumous miracles that served the same purpose in a general sense as the canonization miracle collections: proving the sanctity of the miracle worker. However, while the miracles included in *vitae* were an appeal to the listener or reader to recognize the sanctity by the signs of its action, the other type of collections served as evidence submitted to the pope's officials. Miracles recorded in a hagiographical context were usually closely associated with the life of an individual saint, while those collected in order to start a canonization process focused more on the mechanism of miracle working.

Like numerous miracle stories recorded from continental Europe, miracle collections from Iceland represent religious experiences that were recorded and encouraged, if not orchestrated, by the ecclesiastical authorities. Around forty of Guðmundr's miracles are *in vita* which is relatively rare in the records of continental cults after the twelfth century (Bernard of Clairvaux's *in vita* miracles are notable).⁴⁷ It is not known where the collection of Guðmundr's miracles was kept

⁴⁶ Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind. Theory, Record and Event. 1000–1215* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1987); Anders Frøjmark has underlined the role of suppliants and witnesses of miracles in his brief study 'The 'Voice of the People' in Some Late-Medieval Miracle-Collections', in *Saints and Sagas. A Symposium*, ed. by Hans Bekker-Nielsen and others (Odense: Odense University Press, 1994), 89–108. Although both Ward and Frøjmark concentrate mainly on miracles attributed to canonized saints, or documents prepared for a process which has already begun, such a comparison with the sources concerning Guðmundr is vital in order to see if any parallels can be drawn.

⁴⁷ See e.g. Ward, *Miracles*, pp. 175–84.

before it was incorporated into the sagas, even the way it happened is disputable: Björn Magnússon Ólsen has suggested that the compilation of miracles was a part of *Sturlunga saga* from the beginning, while according to Jón Jóhannesson's view it only appeared in the compilation when its younger part (now to be found in *Reykjafjarðarbók*) was created around 1400.⁴⁸ It seems unlikely that the miracle book was kept at Hólar as a testimony to numerous pilgrimages to the bishop's grave, as little indicates that his remains had the status of the first and foremost relic. If the sagas are to be trusted, the wells and springs consecrated by Guðmundr enjoyed that function to a much greater extent. Besides, a pilgrimage to Guðmundr's grave at Hólar is mentioned a few times both in *Jarteinabók* and in *Guðmundar sögur*, but not very frequently. Thus, the see does not seem to have enjoyed the status of a pilgrimage centre. At the same time it must be borne in mind that miracles which occurred at a distance from the saints' graves were a growing phenomenon in Western Europe from the thirteenth century onwards. Thus, what seems to be a feature characteristic of Guðmundr's cult might have been formed by hagiographers inspired by the foreign trends.

At the same time, local varieties and trends must be taken into consideration: the authors' and compilers' wish to incorporate at least some stories into a saga convention. It is plausible that the form of Guðmundr's miracle book differs from standard sources of this kind because an official canonization never took place, nor was applied for according to the procedures. However, it is also likely that *GJtb* is the result of a long process and its different parts reflect different stages of the cult as well as various authorial concepts.

1.4. *Annals*

The Icelandic annals and bishops' sagas had some mutual influence on each other. *Prestssaga* was constructed on the basis of a set of annals and the authors of many bishops' sagas provided information which was later used in annal collections.⁴⁹ The oldest preserved redactions (*Resensannáll/Annal I*, *Forni annáll/Annal II*, *Høyers annáll/Annal III*

⁴⁸ Björn Magnússon Ólsen, *Um Sturlungu* (Copenhagen: S. L. Møller, 1902), esp. pp. 293–7, Jón Jóhannesson, 'Introduction', p. xx.

⁴⁹ Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas*, p. 186, Stefán Karlsson, 'Guðmundar sögur biskups', p. 154. Ólafía Einarsdóttir has disagreed with this view (Ólafía Einarsdóttir,

and the oldest part of *Konungsannáll/Annal IV*) were written at the end of the thirteenth century and beginning of the fourteenth century. The oldest part of *Annal IV* ends in 1306. This annal is more extensive than I–III, especially when it comes to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The older redactions are based until c. 1300 on annals related to I–III and IV. Few of the medieval annals date past the end of the fourteenth century, with the exception of *Nýi annáll (Skálholtsannáll/Annals V and VI)*, *Lögmannsannáll (Annal VII)*, *Gottskálksannáll (Annal VIII)*, *Flateyjarannáll (Annal IX)* and *Oddaverjaannáll (Annal X)*.⁵⁰ The oldest annals as well as most of the later ones, contain an abbreviated summary of world events, starting often with the birth of Christ or the first centuries after his death. The chronological system is probably based on Easter tables.⁵¹ The majority of information on events from Iceland and the whole North is taken from Icelandic historical writing. It has been suggested that Ari's *Íslendingabók* is the source for the oldest events; other works might have been: *Hungrvaka*, *Íslendinga saga*, other sagas from the *Sturlunga saga* compilation, and kings' sagas such as *Sverris saga*, *Heimskringla*, *Knýtlinga saga*, *Hákonar saga Hákonarssonar*, *Magnús saga lagabætis*.⁵² As records of information the annals are most important in covering the period from 1330 to 1430, when the writing of the contemporary sagas came to an end.⁵³

Annalistics on Iceland started probably around 1300. Certain scholars have used those sources in their studies quite frequently; Hallvard Magerøy used the annals to determine the communication between Iceland and Norway in the Middle Ages.⁵⁴ Others, like Eldbjørg Haug, have questioned the infallibility of that source and their historical

Studier i Kronologisk Metode. Tidlig Islands Historiekrivning, Bibliotheca historica Lundensis, 13 (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1964).

⁵⁰ In Gustav Storm's edition (used in the present study) the annals are designated as follows: I. *Annales Reseniani* (K), II *Annales vetustissimi* (B), III. *Henrik Høyers Annaler* (O), IV. *Annales regii* (C), V. *Skálholts-Annaler* (D), VI. Annalbrudstykke fra Skálholt (N), VII. *Lögmanns-annáll* (E), VIII. *Gottskalks Annáll* (P), IX. *Flatøbogens Annaler* (A), X. *Oddverja Annál*.

⁵¹ This supposition is borne out by the fact that all the oldest Icelandic annals use Sunday and Easter letters to identify the year in which the events recorded took place (Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas*, p. 186).

⁵² Jakob Benediktsson, 'Árböcker. Norge, Island', in *KLNM I*, 435–7; Eldbjørg Haug, 'The Icelandic Annals as Historical Sources', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 22 (1997), 263–74 and Ólafía Einarisdóttir, 'Studier'.

⁵³ Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas*, p. 187.

⁵⁴ Hallvard Magerøy, *Soga om austmenn: nordmenn som siglde til Island og Grønland i mellomalderen*, Det norske videnskaps-akademi, Skrifter 2, Hist.-filos. klasse. Ny serie, vol. 19 (Oslo: Samlaget, 1993).

value.⁵⁵ The dubious nature of the annals as a primary source is due to the process of the composition. Even if they were written down as notes contemporary with the events they describe, they could have been supplemented with contemporary oral messages. Such a collection of facts usually underwent further transformations, many centuries later, and was supplemented with information from various sources both oral and written.

Critical examinations of other Nordic annalistics have indicated that all the notices as they appear in the manuscripts are written at a fixed period, not much later than the younger notices. All the oldest Icelandic annals are based on older yearbooks, but the last notices in each of them were most probably independent continuations and contemporary information, written down consecutively year by year. The annals were often written by several generations of different authors and their emphasis was on *events*, not the accuracy of dates. Mostly written at the monasteries and chapter houses, they were intended for internal use, which also implies an ecclesiastical point of view. The reliability of the Icelandic annals as first-hand contemporary records is disputable. However, they should not be ignored in a study of a saints' cult as the way the saint and events from his life or concerning his veneration are recorded may provide valuable information about the perception of his saintliness by the authors and copyists. Although the Icelandic annals and the sagas have borrowed information from each other, each type of source refers to Guðmundr's holy status in a different way. For instance, in contrast with the saga material, none of the annals mentions him as "Saint Guðmundr" or "Blessed Guðmundr". The annals also provide some information about Guðmundr's cult which is not to be found in any saga, such as the act of washing his relics in 1344. Another aspect which can be examined thanks to the comparison of the annals and the sagas is the information on poor weather and difficult living conditions in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The number and variety of sources which contain this information might prove the authenticity of it (especially when confirmed by scientific data) and partially explain why the image of Guðmundr Arason as the "father of the poor" and a provider of food was created.

⁵⁵ Haug, 'The Icelandic Annals'.

1.5. *Charters*

MÁLDAGAR are charters containing church inventory books, lists of the churches' income and transactions; thus they are purely historiographic sources. Very few of the originals have survived, the exception is a *máldagi* of the church at Reykholt (c. 1185–1275), one of the oldest Icelandic manuscripts in existence.⁵⁶ The majority, however, are known only from the seventeenth-century copies.⁵⁷ The oldest collection of *máldagar* preserved in its more or less original form was made for the diocese of Hólar by Bishop Auðunn Þorbergsson, hence the name *Auðunarmáldagi*, and is dated to circa 1318. It contains 98 charters and is preserved in two copies: from 1639 and 1645.⁵⁸ Auðunn was a member of the cathedral chapter in Niðaróss and had the title of *beneficiarius/prebendarius* for the area of Trondenes before he was elected bishop of Hólar. The period of his episcopacy was active and rich in innovations, including the building of a new cathedral and the translation of Guðmundr Arason's relics. Auðunn had good experience as a church administrator, and must have been familiar with the Norwegian charters. His yearly visitations to the Hólar diocese gave him the opportunity to learn about the church possessions and gain access to all the records that existed at the time.⁵⁹ Auðunn's initiative was an unwelcome novelty in Iceland at the time, which might be suggested by the letter sent in 1319 by the farmers from the North to King Hákon Magnússon.⁶⁰ Many of the lesser churches were still private property after the compromise at Ögvaldsnes in 1297 and the farmers were not willing to let the bishop have control over their finances.⁶¹ Two other collections from the diocese of Hólar are dated to the fourteenth century: *Máldagabók Jóns skalla*, made by or under the supervision of

⁵⁶ Magnús Stefánsson, *Staðir og Staðamál. Studier i islandske egenkirkelige og beneficalrettslige forhold i middelalderen* (Bergen: Historisk institutt, Universitetet i Bergen, 2000), p. 85, Orri Vésteinsson, 'Counting cows and chalices. The Icelandic *máldagar* as political instruments', a paper presented at a symposium Snorrastofa (Reykholt, 3.–6 October 2002).

⁵⁷ Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 25.

⁵⁸ Edited in *DI* II 240.–336., pp. 423–89.

⁵⁹ Some of the charters included in the *Auðunarmáldagi* are the bishop's redactions or redactions made under his supervision, of entries older than his collection (Magnús Stefánsson, *Staðir*, pp. 86–7).

⁶⁰ *DI* II, 337.

⁶¹ Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland* 2000, p. 132.

another Norwegian Bishop Jón Eiríksson⁶² and *Pétrsmáldagar*, made or ordered by the Danish Bishop Pétr Nikulásson (bp. 1391–1411).⁶³ *Máldagabók* is preserved in copies from 1639 and 1645 and contains 35 charters dated to c. 1360–89. *Pétrsmáldagar* constitute 80 charters dated to 1394 “and later”. The main manuscripts in which those charters are preserved, are the copy from 1639 (which also includes *Auðunarmáldagi* and *Máldagabók Jóns skalla*) and AM 273. 4to.⁶⁴

The nature and purpose of this source has been discussed by several scholars, but the veneration of saints was rarely the point of departure.⁶⁵ However, this aspect is difficult to study because of the dubious nature of the charters as primary sources. While those from Hólar are sufficiently uniform to allow comparison of church property at the beginning and end of the fourteenth century, this is not the case for Skálholt. The most comprehensive source is *Vilchinsmáldagi/Vilchinsbók*, compiled by a Danish Bishop, Vilchin Hinriksson (bp. 1391–1405), dated to 1397 and preserved in a MS from c. 1600.⁶⁶ Dating of the acquisition of particular objects by the churches is very uncertain and in the majority of the cases it is impossible to determine the dates of individual entries. The information concerning church dedications is even more difficult as not all *máldagar* list the church’s patrons, and some name only one, either the main patron of the church or the first in a list of several saints. Such lists were often arranged hierarchically, hence the presence of the Virgin Mary as a sole patron of a large number of churches.⁶⁷ Also the date of a dedication is impossible to

⁶² *DI* III, 115.–149., pp. 155–78. Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 25, Magnús Stefánsson, *Staðir*, p. 89.

⁶³ *DI* III, 419.–498., pp. 508–91. Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 25, Magnús Stefánsson, *Staðir*, p. 89.

⁶⁴ *DI* III, 419.–498, p. 511.

⁶⁵ Margaret Cormack has concentrated on the cult of saints (Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, pp. 25–29). Magnús Stefánsson has discussed *máldagar* in the context of church/church property ownership, including the patronage of the saints (Magnús Stefánsson, *Staðir*, esp. pp. 77–127). Orri Vésteinsson’s paper ‘Counting cows and chalices. The Icelandic *máldagar* as political instruments’ given at Snorrastofa 2002 focused on the aspect of power. In the unpublished version of his doctoral thesis Orri Vésteinsson has briefly discussed *máldagar* as a primary source (Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland. Priests, Power and Social Change 1000–1300*, a doctoral thesis submitted at University College, London, 1996, pp. 37–49).

⁶⁶ *DI* IV, 17.–300., pp. 27–240. For further discussion of the material see Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, pp. 25–6, Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland*, 1996, pp. 37–9, Magnús Stefánsson, *Staðir*, p. 91.

⁶⁷ The Virgin Mary was one of the saints “prominent at any period”; otherwise saints who usually appear as primary patrons were probably very popular during the first two centuries of Christianity in Iceland when the majority of the churches

establish since only a small group of *máldagar* mention the date of the church's consecration. Many churches were not formally dedicated until long after they were built. A great number of churches from the diocese of Hólar are marked as *ecclesia non dedicata*, despite the fact that the churches had been in use for a long period of time. Cormack suggests that, since they were neither new nor lacking a patron saint, the process must have been a question of formal dedication resulting in the establishment of a Dedication Day, a feast of the highest order on the anniversary of the dedication.⁶⁸

An interesting fact to be observed is the evaluation of this type of evidence: the few *máldagar* dated to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are shaped according to various patterns and differ from the charters dated to the fourteenth century, when they began to be standardised by the bishops.⁶⁹ Two sets of laws, *Kristinna laga þátrr* and *Kristinrétrr Árna biskups*, make it the duty of the farmer to compose a *máldagi* in an agreement with a bishop. According to *Grágás* it was necessary to have the charters acknowledged at the assembly, while Bishop Árni's law does not present it as an obligation. As Magnús Stefánsson suggested, the authority of the local assemblies lessened and that of the bishops increased, which might have influenced this change.⁷⁰ Those records helped the bishops execute their *potestas iurisdictionis* and stay in control of the church possessions: both the inventories and the land.

The issues of the "ownership" and "protection" of the churches and their possessions was linked to the cult of saints. The law of Bishop Árni Þorláksson (bp. 1269–1298) used the familiar idea of *ius spiritali annexum* in order to legitimize the episcopal control of the Icelandic churches and their inventories.⁷¹ The law demanded the public acknowledgement of a *máldagi* at a given parish on the dedication day or, if the church was not dedicated to any saint, once a year when the majority of people would gather there. There are many examples of *máldagar* referring to the saints as the owners of objects or land offered by the faithful to the churches.⁷² Thus, if used with caution, the

were built. Saints whose veneration spread later were added to the lists of patrons. Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 27.

⁶⁸ Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 27.

⁶⁹ Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland* 1996.

⁷⁰ Magnús Stefánsson, *Staðir*, p. 84.

⁷¹ Magnús Stefánsson, *Staðir*, p. 84.

⁷² Magnús Stefánsson, *Staðir*, pp. 200–6.

Icelandic charters can provide valuable information about Icelandic society and the perception of sainthood, especially when compared with the normative sources.

1.6. *Laws*

The collection of Icelandic legal statements, known as *Grágás*, is an extensive text. No twelfth century copy has survived, but it is extant in two well-preserved manuscripts from the thirteenth century known as *Konungsbók* and *Staðarhólsbók*.⁷³ The manuscripts are very different, as *Konungsbók* contains sections which are not found in *Staðarhólsbók*, which may be attributed to the fact that the former was written down after a new constitution, *Járnsíða*, had been introduced in the country in 1271.⁷⁴ It is doubtful that *Grágás* represents an official collection of laws. It should rather be considered either a private collection of laws adopted by the Law Council and written down by individuals, or a “rights’ book” containing notes on legal provisions that may not necessarily have been adopted by law. There is no indication that *Grágás* was ever consulted as an authority at the general assembly.

Kristinréttur Árna biskups. In 1275 the Christian Law of Bishop Árni Þorláksson was adopted in Iceland and replaced the “Christian Laws’ Section” of *Grágás*. Until 1275 the ecclesiastical laws had been a part of the secular law codex *Grágás*, but now they were separate, and the acceptance of this new law established canon law in Iceland. It is largely based on the Christian Law of Archbishop Jón rauði (abp. 1268–82), the Christian Law of Gulaping and articles from the “Christian Laws’ Section” of *Grágás* (mainly the tithe-law), but it also includes sections from *Liber extra* and *Decretum Gratiani*. Although it was accepted at

⁷³ Two principal manuscripts are GkS 1157 fol. for *Konungsbók* and AM 334 fol. for *Staðarhólsbók*. Various dates are suggested: Jesse Byock dates the texts to 1250 and the 1260s respectively, while Ian Miller dates them to 1260 and 1280 (Jesse L. Byock, *Medieval Iceland. Society, Sagas and Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press) and William I. Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking. Feud, Law and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990)). Patricia Pires Boulhosa suggests c. 1250 for *Konungsbók* and c. 1260–70 for *Staðarhólsbók* (Patricia Pires Boulhosa, *Icelanders and the Kings of Norway. Medieval Sagas and Legal Texts*. The Northern World. North Europe and the Baltic c. 400–1700 AD. Peoples, Economies and Cultures, ed. by Barbara Crawford and others (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005).

⁷⁴ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Chieftains and Power*, p. 18. *Staðarhólsbók*, however, contains passages missing in *Konungsbók*.

the general assembly, it has been debated whether the Christian Law of Bishop Árni was adopted for both Skálholt and Hólar in 1275 or for Skálholt alone, followed considerably later by Hólar in 1354.⁷⁵

Secular laws of Iceland after the fall of the Commonwealth are represented by *Jónsbók*, named after the lawspeaker Jón Einarson (d. 1306), one of its authors, who brought the law code from Norway to Iceland in 1280. The original manuscript is lost, but numerous extant copies can be dated as early as the first half of the thirteenth century. It was written to replace *Járnsíða*, the first Icelandic law code compiled 1271–1281, strongly criticized as it incorporated mainly Norwegian law and ignored the Icelandic conditions.⁷⁶ *Jónsbók* was a more acceptable version. Icelanders must have taken part in the code's composition as it shows similarities to *Grágás*.⁷⁷

Together with other documents such as the episcopal statutes or royal letters, the laws provide a general overview of the situation in Iceland in the period under consideration. As normative sources that comprise a lot of foreign material inadequate to the Icelandic conditions, they nevertheless contain information about certain concepts valuable at the time. The regulations of religious life, almsgiving and salvation of the soul are especially useful since the mediatory role of the saints is frequently depicted as a means of achieving this. *Staðamál* and the issues of the ownership or rights to the church goods draws our attention to the most material aspect of a saints' cult and puts the clerical efforts to spread a particular ideology in an interesting perspective.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Recently the majority of Icelandic scholars have agreed upon the former. See also Magnús Lyngdal Magnússon, “‘Kátt er þeim af kristinrétti, kærur vilja margar læra’. Af kristinrétti Árna, setningu hans og valdsviði”, *Gripla* 15 (2004), pp. 43–90 and ‘Introduction’, in *Járnsíða og Kristinréttur Árna Þorlákssonar*, ed. by Haraldur Bernharðsson and others (Reykjavík: Smárit sögufélags, 2005), 13–51, pp. 26–44.

⁷⁶ *Járnsíða* is preserved in a single thirteenth century manuscript, AM 334 fol. and a few later copies.

⁷⁷ *Árna saga biskups* relates the disagreement between laymen and clergy about the confiscation of property—*staðamál* and unsuitability to the Icelandic conditions slowed down the acceptance of *Jónsbók*. Only in 1314 did the code finally take the form in which it remained valid for 400 years.

⁷⁸ The term *staðamál* could be literally translated as “the issue of *staðir*”, and is commonly used in reference to the conflict between the Icelandic Church and the laymen about the management of *staðir*. The definition of *staðir* has been rather problematic for Icelandic and non-Icelandic scholars (see e.g. Magnús Stefánsson 2000, pp. 19–36). Also its use in the sources varied. A general and simplified definition describes as *staðr* a parish church together with surrounding grounds which the church

The study of the perception of Guðmundr Arason as a saint could barely be regarded as sufficient if any of the aforementioned sources were missing. One obvious reason for that is that since so much material has to be supplied from the sixteenth century copies, not to mention lacunae and the fact that a large number of texts are lost, the research is limited. Another reason is the “discourse” between the hagiographical and historiographic sources needed in order to achieve an at least partially complete image of the perception of Guðmundr’s saintliness in the century after his death. The biggest obstacle in the current research was my inability to use GC in its entirety. The manuscripts are not in a good condition and the edition of the text is currently in preparation. Until GC is edited and published, a satisfactory comparison of all the variants is impossible.

The contrasts between the different types of narrative sources are not very sharp. Both contemporary sagas and bishops’ sagas, but also annals, contain large parts of a hagiographic character. All those sources complement one another, and as the author cannot be identified in each case, one may only assume the ways in which this kind of information circulated in clerical circles. Moreover, since the clerical and the lay elite was so closely related and since the environment in which they compiled and composed their texts was so small, the common features should not be surprising. Still, it would be wrong to hypothesize that all the authors merely copied one another. Individual features and attitudes are noticeable and, as far as the study of perception is concerned, they are very significant. As for individual author-

owns. Central Church institutions such as monasteries and episcopal sees could also be described as *staðir*. In certain cases where a parish church owned only a part of the grounds surrounding it but had full rights to that part, it formed an independent unit together with that area, and that unit might also be called a *staðr*. Parish churches which were situated on the grounds belonging partially to the church or which owned other grounds were called *bændakirkjur* (*bóndi*, a farmer who owned the property, had the main authority over them). *Staðamál* concerned the episcopal authority over all the churches, their capital and income. The first significant conflict between the clerical and the secular authorities took place at the end of the twelfth century and was initiated by Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson, while the second one was started by Bishop Árni Þorláksson at the end of the thirteenth century. Þorlákr’s achievement was the establishment of his authority over *staðir* and giving them to the farmers as a fief. Árni decided to give all the *staðir* to the priests and establish the system of benefices in Iceland (the *staðir* would be priestly estates and the source of the priests’ income). Vital aspects of that issue have been presented in e.g. *Staðir og staðamál* by Magnús Stefánsson and *Church Centers. Church Centers in Iceland from the 11th to the 13th Century and their Parallels in Other Countries*, ed. by Helgi Þorláksson (Reykholt: Snorrastofa, Cultural and Medieval Centre, 2005), esp. ch. 3, ‘Large Churches and Church Centres’, 105–66.

ship, is concerned, it must be borne in mind that during the process of rewriting and compiling entire passages underwent changes. Each saga examined in this study could be ascribed to more than one author, and the references to “authorial perspective” include the compilers as well. Since a few names of potential authors are known, and it has been assumed that particular narratives have been composed by these individuals (Sturla Þórðarson, Lambkár Þorgilsson and Arngrímr Brandsson), they are used throughout the thesis in reference to those texts. Perhaps especially the relationship between the sagas and the annals, prove that the circulation of certain information, specifically, certain events considered as facts (including dates and names) counted for the authors. Certainly, a hagiography is primarily a medium for symbolic representation.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the sources under consideration demonstrate that certain facts were established and functioned as points of reference. By alluding to them the authors also made their stories more credible to the potential audience. The same concerns the presence of genealogies whose importance was essential to the medieval Icelandic audience. The approach towards historical truth was certainly different in the high Middle Ages than it is in modern times. However, it would be inaccurate to say that to all the authors of *Guðmundar sögur* or annals “there were no historically neutral actions” as everything was thought to be a part of divine plan.⁸⁰ A lot of events were perceived as events and depicted as such.

How representative the sources are is another question. Though elements of folklore are present in numerous passages, it is hardly possible to discern if the author simply found them interesting for literary purposes or genuinely believed in them. It may safely be suggested that the presence of ghosts, ogres or changelings was an integral part of Christian faith in medieval Iceland and the possibility that the learned clergy shared those beliefs cannot be entirely excluded. The “popular” initiative to spread Guðmundr’s cult can to some degree be reflected by the contents of charters, but their deficiency and the young age of the copies makes it problematic. However, since few saints’ cults have been purely clerical initiatives, one must assume that some support for the veneration of Guðmundr existed among both clerics and lay people; the amount of the source material alone would point to that.

⁷⁹ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 11.

⁸⁰ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 69.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CHILDHOOD OF A SAINT

One of the difficulties in the collection of data dealing with the formative years of the saint (...) lies in the differing concerns of medieval biographers and hagiographers. For them, the essence of the saint's mission resides in the period after his conversion to the religious life, and his biography is not so much the celebration of one individual, but of the entire value system or style of life which he personifies. In a frustratingly large number of contemporary biographies, the early lives are given in the barest outline, purely as an introduction to the miracles and virtues practised by the saint in adulthood.¹

Having considered the amount and variety of hagiographical works, one could not disagree with Michael Goodich's statement. Guðmundur Arason's clerical career and the miracles which he performed as a grown up man attracted the majority of the biographers' attention. However, the description of the saint's early years is more than "the barest outline". D. Weinstein and R. Bell have argued that between approximately 1200 and 1500, independent of the changing quality of the sources, childhood received a special emphasis in hagiography.² In many hagiographies childhood and adolescence were of special interest to the authors because of their turbulent and dramatic nature.³ Young people were more prone than adults to experience a sudden conversion or epiphany that would lead to a decisive change in how they led their lives. Other hagiographical texts, however, aimed at portraying the protagonists as typical representatives of their society; the presence of portents would point at their noble future, but without overshadowing the saint's human behaviour.

¹ Michael Goodich, *Vita perfecta, the ideal of sainthood in the thirteenth century* (Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 1982), p. 82.

² Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, p. 45.

³ See e.g. Goodich, *Vita perfecta*, pp. 82–121 or Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, pp. 17–72.

2.1. “[...] he had never heard such a child’s voice before”

In Iceland in the second half of the twelfth century the development of domains was beginning.⁴ Two domains developed in the Northern quarter; one was centred in Skagafjörður at the end of the eleventh century, while the other had its nucleus in Eyjafjörður around the year 1200 (in the 1180s). It was the family of Ásbirningar that had gained control over Skagafjörður, and in the early twelfth century they extended their domain so that it encompassed the eastern part of Húnaþing.⁵ The western part of Húnaþing, Þingeyrarþing and Eyjafjörður were among the parts of twelfth-century Iceland where every farmer was still free to choose the allegiance to a chieftain, contrary to other areas where the allegiance was limited by the boundaries of the chieftaincies (*goðorðs*).⁶ If the relation with a chieftain proved unsatisfactory it was possible for a farmer to offer his service to another one. Eyjafjörður was the area where Guðmundr Arason’s family resided when he was born.

Whether a mistake or a disagreement among the authors is to blame, the actual day of Guðmundr’s birth in 1161 is difficult to establish. According to *GP* it took place three days before Michaelmas, that is: on 26 September, while according to *GA* it was three days *after* Michaelmas.⁷ Guðmundr, the second son of Ari Þorgeirsson and Úlfheiðr Gunnarsdóttir and one of their four children, was born at Grjótá in Hörgárdalur. The farm was at the time owned by Steinunn Þorsteinsdóttir who, on her mother’s side, was a cousin to Guðmundr Arason’s mother.⁸ The authors of particular texts on Guðmundr leave no doubts about the fact that Guðmundr’s holiness was already mani-

⁴ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Chieftains and Power*, pp. 62–3, see also fig. 2. on p. 67. *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* and the first part of *Ísls*, used here quite extensively, are the main sources on the chieftaincy system in the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth centuries in northern Iceland. See also Björn Sigfússon, ‘Full goðorð og forn og heimildir frá 12. öld’, *Saga*, 3 (1960), 48–75 (p. 59).

⁵ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Chieftains and Power*, pp. 66–67. Orri Vésteinsson disagrees with that view and suggests the beginning of their dominance dates to the end of the twelfth century (Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland* 2000, p. 160).

⁶ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Chieftains and Power*, pp. 120–23.

⁷ “[...] þrimr nóttum fyrir Mikjálsmessu”/“iij. nöttum eptir Michals Messo” (*GP*, ch. 1, *GA*, ch. 3, *GB*, ch. 2) *GD* gives a more simplified dating: “quarto kalendas octobris” (ch. 4). Arngrímur places a very elaborate explanation as to the year of Guðmundr’s birth, but does not mention the exact day. *GP* is the first source to give those details and *GB* agrees with it on the date. Translation throughout the thesis is mine unless otherwise stated.

⁸ Genealogy 21.

fested at his birth. “An old, wise man”, Guðmundr *kárhöfði*, had a premonition about the outstanding future of the baby.⁹ In *GP* as well as in *GA* it is mentioned that the baby’s cry filled the man with awe. That detail is missing in Arngrímur’s version, which is not meaningless as *GD* mentions the “visionary” as a wise priest (“einn vitr kennimaðr”). One might get the impression that according to Arngrímur’s standards it was much more appropriate for a priest to witness this kind of event; a clergyman would not be awestruck by such a message.

The saint’s namesake was one of many people presented by the sagas as witnesses to his holiness. Beside the fact that he was a wise man and that he lived at the farm Grjótá, nothing is known about him.¹⁰ This event bears a striking resemblance to that from the *vita* of Guðmundr’s predecessor at Hólar: Jón’s exceptional future was predicted by a certain “Guðini inn góði”.¹¹ The similarity of names and their meaning is an interesting issue in this context. Many medieval hagiographies contain digressions on the etymological source and connotations of the saint’s name. The holiness of Nicholas was predicted by his namesake, his maternal uncle and bishop, after he had heard about the new born baby boy standing on his own while being washed.¹² In fact, the authors of his *vita* leave the reader with the impression that the name influenced the future saint’s fate to a large extent, and was strengthened later by the bishop’s blessing for his nephew. Also the father of

⁹ The texts refer to different kinds of wisdom: the man is mentioned as able to prophesize and well learned: “[...] vitr maðr ok fróðr” (*GP*, ch. 1); according to *GA* which refers to him as Guðmundr *karlhöfði*, he was “uitr maðr ok margfroðr” (ch. 3), *karhofdi* appears also in *GB*, introduced as “vitr maðr ok forspær” (ch. 2). In the youngest saga only his nickname—*kárhöfði*—is mentioned in the poem by Einarr Gilsson (ch. 4).

¹⁰ He only appears once more in *GP*, where he “had a vision”: “fekk Guðmundr *kárhöfði* vitran” (*GP*, ch. 6), according to *GA*: “vitrun af guði ok Agnete meyju” (ch. 8), a vision concerning God and the holy virgin Agnes. The vision itself, however, is not recorded in the extant sources.

¹¹ *JS*, ch. 1. The man prophesized about Jón’s holiness when the future bishop was a child, not at his birth (as it was in Guðmundr’s case). No further information is available on Guðini *inn góði* or the place where he lived. Two church inventory books mention land donations attributed to him and the transaction is dated to ca. 1070, but the document was probably made c. 1150. (*DI* I, 30. and 31.)

¹² “Dyrd þer, gud, er agætr ert i helgum manni þinum ok lofadr um alldir, þviat nu er guds madr borinn” (*Nikolaus saga erkibyskups* I, ch. 1), “Heyrdu eilifr gud, lofligr ok dasamligr um uendiligar veralldir i þinum helgum monnum! Þer se dyrd ok udaulig æra, þviat nu er guds madr fæddr i verolldina” (*Nikolaus saga erkibyskups* II, ch. 20).

Ambrose, who prophesized about his son's future, was his namesake. He was the one to predict the greatness of his baby son on the basis of a sign: a fly sat on the future saint's face and kept coming in and out of his mouth, having in the end flown so high that it disappeared out of sight. The earl took it as a good omen and understood that the words which would come from the mouth of that boy one day would make him a person of importance, and that he was born for achievements on a grand scale.¹³ The use of a motif that was well known from other hagiographical writings in Guðmundr's biography reflects not only the authorial awareness of that material. Such references, especially in a direct comparison to other, well known (and established) saints, served as examples of *communio sanctorum*, the communion of saints: the spiritual union of all members of the Christian Church living and the deceased, those on earth and in heaven. They were all part of a single mystical body in which each member contributed to the good of all. Thus, every work on a saint was understood as a part of a greater tradition and such borrowings were not perceived as a simple copying that resulted from the lack of authorial imagination.¹⁴

Regardless of Guðmundr *kárhöfði's* true identity the message of all the saga variants is the same: having heard the baby cry, the man said that he had never heard such a child's voice before and added that if the baby boy survived infancy, he would prove to be outstanding among other men.¹⁵ Like in the cases of Jón, Nicholas or Ambrose, the statement seems to have been accepted without a doubt. Nobody is reported to have questioned it. The description of Guðmundr's earliest years is certainly no less impressive than that of St. Þorlákr or Jón. None of the holy Icelandic bishops seems to have revealed any special features during their babyhood. When compared to them, the example of Nicholas is rather extreme. Not only was he able to stand on his own a while

¹³ "Til mikils nokkurs skal sia fæddr, ef lífi heldr" (*Ambrosius saga byskups*, ch. 2).

¹⁴ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, pp. 123–42.

¹⁵ "Hann mælti, er sveininn kvað við nýfæddr, at hann lézt einskis barns rödd slíka heyrð hafa ok kvaðst víst vita, at þat barn myndi afbragð verða annarra manna, ef lífi heldi." (*GP*, ch. 1), "ok er sagt fra orða til tekio hans. þa er sveininn | kvað við nýfæddr. þat er eptir gecc síðan. at hann lez engis barns raudd slíka heyrð hafa. ok kuaz hann uist uita at þat barn munde verða af bragð annarra manna. ef lífe hellde. ok kallade ser bioða otta mikinn. er hann heyrðe til" (*GA*, ch. 3), "ok er sva sagt fra orðvm hans þa er sveinniN grett nýfæðr at hann lezst eingis barns rað þvilika heyrtt hafa. ok sagðiz þat hyGía at þat barnn mvndi afbragð verða annara manna ef lífi helldi ok sagði ser bioða otta mikiN er hann heyrði til (*GB*, ch. 2).

after being born, but also distinguished between fasting and regular days and, apparently, refused his mother's breast on Wednesdays and Fridays.¹⁶ This is a typical example of the otherness of the holy babies/young children, and their rejection of what is understandably naturally human (conscious rejection of food on Fridays, from sexually active mothers or adulterous nannies, refusal of any physical contact, even with their parents). Impressive as it may have appeared to medieval Icelanders, this model was never applied to any vernacular hagiography. Moreover, the presence of the parents of all the Icelandic holy prelates has been depicted as anything but inferior.

2.2. *The role of the family*

Guðmundr's father, Ari Þorgeirsson, was the fifth son of Chieftain Þorgeirr Hallason (d. 1169). Þorgeirr lived at Hvassafell in Eyjafjörður and was married to Hallbera Einarsdóttir (d. 1179), the daughter of Chieftain Einarr Arason.¹⁷ According to the sagas, Ari was a respectful, though adventurous man.¹⁸ Not much information is available on his relationship with Guðmundr's mother, except for the fact that she had been married off against her will to another man and, subsequently, Ari became her lover. Úlfheiðr's parentage does not seem to have been of high social status, but on her mother's side she had connections with the powerful family of Eyrbyggjar. Úlfheiðr and Ari had four children together: Klemet,¹⁹ Guðmundr, Guðrún and Gunnarr. Klemet and Gunnarr died at a very young age, but the fate of the girl is not mentioned by any of the authors; nevertheless it can be assumed that she did not survive childhood either.²⁰ The mortality of children in medieval Iceland was most probably as high as in other parts of northern Europe at the time, where the death rate during the first

¹⁶ *Nikolaus saga erkibyskups* I, ch. 1; *Nikolaus saga erkibyskups* II, ch. 22.

¹⁷ Genealogy 21. Name index/*Sts* II, p. 461, contains the information about him living first at Krossanes, then at Reykholt.

¹⁸ "Hann var mikill maðr ok sterkr" (*GP*, ch. 1); "Hann var mikill maðr ok efniligr. ok okuangaðr" (*GA*, ch. 2)

¹⁹ According to *GA* the first son's name was Kléngur, not Klemet.

²⁰ They probably did not all reach adolescence, or perhaps even survive childhood. Klemet/Kléngur. "andaðist ungr" (*GP*)/ "do ungr" (*GA*), it is also said about Gunnarr that he "andaðist ungr" (in *GP*, *GA* and *GB*. In *GB* only the last child is commented upon this way). There is no other information available about Úlfheiðr's husband, the children or Ari's other relationships.

seven years of life has been estimated to 625–650 per 1000.²¹ Thus, the information is not surprising, although the fact that Guðmundr was the only one to survive might have been perceived as a meaningful sign, a proof that he had been born to live and become a saint.

Not much is known about Úlfheiðr and Ari's relationship: the saga material provides an interesting and slightly ironic observation on the state of their household:

En er til tók lag þeira Ara ok Úlfheiðar, lét hon koma í hendr honum fimmtán hundruð þriggja álna aura til forráða ok meðferðar. Ok hafði hon þá eftir gullhring ok marga gripi aðra. En fyrir því at Ari var maðr stórlýndr, þá lagðist þetta fé brátt í lóg.²²

Whether it was the uncertain future of that household or other reasons, shortly after Guðmundr's birth (the same year) Ari left for Norway to join King Ingi Haraldsson's (k. 1136–1161) party and focus on his military career there. That was not an unusual thing for an Icelander to do. The Norwegian civil wars started with the conflict between Magnús Sigurðarson *blindi* (k. 1130–1135/39) and Haraldr Magnússon *gilli* (k. 1130–1136) after their joint rule 1130–1134.²³ Offering service to a Norwegian king was not necessarily perceived as a betrayal of the

²¹ The results of excavations carried out in Sweden for example show that at a cemetery in Frösön (used 1050/1100–1350) 50,3% of the individuals buried had died before the age of seven. At a cemetery in Mære/Norway (used 1100–1550) 52% of the skeletons belonged to children below 15 (Ole Jørgen Benedictow, 'Demography', in *Medieval Scandinavia*, pp. 122–6).

²² When they first set up together, Úlfheið had given Ari fifteen hundred standard marks for the household expenses and his own use, but she retained her gold ring and many other precious possessions. Ari was so extravagant and big-minded that the money was quickly spent (*GP*, ch. 1). See also *GA*, ch. 3 and *GB*, ch. 2. The English version of quotations from *GP* and *ÍslS* is based on *Sturlunga saga*, trans. by J. H. McGrew and R. G. Thomas, 2 vols (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970–4) throughout the thesis.

²³ During Ingi Haraldsson's rule (k. 1136–1161) the foundation of an archbishopric in Niðaróss took place. In 1157 King Ingi chose Eysteinn Erlendsson (abp. 1161–1188) for archbishop, which strengthened his position in Trøndelag. In the first years of the existence of the archbishopric there was a very close cooperation between Archbishop Eysteinn and Erlingr Ormsson *skakki* who, at the time, dominated politics. Their co-operation was based on personal relationship; at the same time it was an alliance between two institutions (Erik Gunnes, *Erkebiskop Øystein: statsmann og kirkebygger* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1996), p. 241 and Sverre Bagge, 'Den heroiske tid- kirkereform og kirkekamp 1153–1214', in *Ecclesia Nidrosiensis 1153–1537. Søkelys på Nidaroskirkens og Nidarosprovens historie*, ed. by Steinar Imsen (Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk Forlag), 51–80).

country and family; it was an opportunity to gain (or recover) a good reputation and, as often followed, material benefit.

However turbulent the everyday life of the family might have been, the basic Christian duties concerning the child were not neglected, as the saga authors report. In spring 1162 after Easter (8 April) Bishop Björn Gilsson (bp. 1147–1162) confirmed one year old Guðmundr at Möðruvellir.²⁴ The authors of *GP*, *GA* and *GB*, who mention Guðmundr's confirmation use actually the word *byskupa* while referring to it. It was a bishop who performed it and it is possible that in this case both baptism and confirmation took place at the same time as one sacrament, conveniently, during the bishop's regular visitations around the countryside.²⁵ Otherwise, Björn Gilsson does not seem to have had any significant influence on the saint's life, and was commemorated by the authors of *GA* and *GB* solely as a great benefactor of the monastery at Munkaþverá.²⁶

Hann gefr hundrað hundraða af staðnum til Munka-Þverár ok sýndi þat tvennt í því, at hann þóttist verit hafa of óveitull af staðarfjánum, en trúði þat mesta styrking kristinnar at styrkja munklifi, ok handsalaði Brandi, frænda sínum, til heimtu, er næstr var biskup eftir hann. En þat var svá forsjáligt, at hann handsalaði þeim, er sjálfir hlaut at gjalda.²⁷

The information about Guðmundr's first sacrament seems to be unique in the native *vitae*. Neither baptism nor confirmation is mentioned in the lives of the other two Icelandic saints, Þorlákr and Jón. In *Heilagra*

²⁴ Genealogy 35.

²⁵ As early as the synod of Orange (441) it was recommended that the confirmation of a child should take place as soon as possible after baptism (Małgorzata Delimata, *Dziecko w Polsce Średniowiecznej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2004), p. 110). For the discussion about the sacraments of baptism and confirmation in medieval Scandinavia and Iceland see e.g. Helge Føhn, 'Dåp', in *KLNM* III, 413–418 and Carl-Gustaf Andrén, 'Konfirmation', in *KLNM* VIII, 690–696. Føhn mentions one of the few rituals accompanying baptism that was a remnant from antiquity, and mentions that it "later" developed into confirmation, although it is not specified when exactly. Delimata suggests the fourth century (Delimata, *Dziecko w Polsce Średniowiecznej*, p. 110), and Hödl the fifth century (L. Hödl, 'Firmung', in *LM* IV, 490–2 (p. 490)).

²⁶ He probably had established it on his ancestral estate (Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland*, 2000, p. 150).

²⁷ "He gave a hundred hundreds from his see to the monastery at Þverá, thereby making plain two things, the first that previously he had not been lavish in distributing his episcopal income and, secondly, that the faith could best be supported by supporting the monastic way of life; he entrusted his kinsman Brand with the task of securing this gift from his successor as bishop. In this he showed great foresight because he entrusted this job to the very man who would have to meet the obligation." (*GP*, ch. 3., *GA*, ch. 8 and *GB*, ch. 8.)

Manna Sögur the baptism of the future Church Fathers or bishops is only mentioned in the case of special circumstances: Augustine and Martin grew up among heathens, thus, the rite had an exceptional, symbolic meaning. Otherwise those sacraments must have been considered an obvious fact by the authors.

Ari was still away when the boy turned two, and his grandfather offered to foster him.²⁸ Úlfheiðr stayed with their son at Hvassafell, with Þorgeirr Hallason, at the time.²⁹ In the autumn of 1163, Ari returned to Iceland and stayed in Hvassafell for two years together with Úlfheiðr and Guðmundr.³⁰ After those two years he left again for Norway with his brother Ingimundr, and Úlfheiðr stayed in Iceland with their son.

The problem of understanding the emotional child-parent relationship in the Middle Ages is a large and very complex one, even if one limits the research to hagiographies. This type of extant source material from Iceland is particularly rich in positive examples, both when it comes to the main characters themselves, or those from the miracle stories.³¹ Mothers often appear to be in focus, which can be explained in several ways. The first cause is natural, the very fact of childbirth and all the issues attached to it; infertility, keeping and caring for the babies in the earliest weeks or months of their lives, their condition, etc., were to a large extent the responsibility of the mother.³²

²⁸ “Þá bauð Þorgeirr Hallason heim til fósturs Guðmundi Arasyni. Ok var sá annarr vetr aldrs hans.” (*GP*, ch. 3, *GA*, ch. 9). *GB*, ch. 8 says “Þa bað Þorgeir Halla s(on) G(vdmvndi) A(ra) s(yni) til sin ok var sa annar vetr alldvrz”.

²⁹ *GA*, ch. 5, *GB*, ch. 3. The author of *GP* does not mention Ari’s family here at all (ch. 2).

³⁰ “[...] þangat var ok kominn Guðmundr, sonr þeira” (*GP*), while according to *GA*, ch. 6: “og uoro þau þar .ij. uetur. enn þangat hafdi komit uetri adur. Guðmundr s(on) þeira”. *GB*, ch. 4 says, “ok þar var med þeim G(vdmvndr) son þeira”.

³¹ Miracle books are a source of particular interest as far as this subject is concerned. See Else Mundal, ‘Forholdet mellom born og foreldre i det norrøne kjeldematerialet’, *Collegium Mediale*, 1 (1988), 9–26, Christian Krötzel, ‘Parent-Child Relations in Medieval Scandinavia according to Scandinavian Miracle Collections’, *Scandinavian Journal of History* 14, 21–37; Else Mundal, ‘Children, Parents and Society as Reflected in Old Norse Sources’, *Nordica Bergensia* 27 (2002), 175–91, Joanna A. Skórzewska, “Sveinn einn ungr fell í sýruker’: Medieval Icelandic Children in Vernacular Miracle Stories” in *Youth and Age in the Medieval North, The Northern World. North Europe and the Baltic c. 400–1700 AD, Peoples, Economies and Cultures* 42, ed. by Shannon Lewis-Simpson (Leiden. Boston: Brill, 2008), 103–26.

³² All those issues have been addressed by scholarship. To give a few examples, Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, focus on the birth of saints (also thanks to the intervention of other saints), Mundal, ‘Forholdet mellom born og foreldre’ and

The second reason to put a saint's mother in focus is the particular dimension of female spirituality: in the sagas of Icelandic saints women enjoy the special privilege of being the recipients of visions and dreams that proclaimed the cult of saints on a much larger scale than men.³³ However, the saintly future of their unborn children is not revealed to any mother, unlike in imported vitae; for instance, Máild, the mother of Thomas Becket, had two dreams and three visions concerning the birth of her son, which was quite exceptional.³⁴ Of all Icelandic bishops only the mother of Lárentíus Kálfsson (bp. 1324–1331) had a particularly meaningful dream about her son's future. She dreamt about entering the cathedral of Hólar and receiving a ring with the image of a bishop.³⁵ That is quite an interesting fact since Lárentíus never gained the reputation of a saint, although many extraordinary events have been noted in his saga, including his birth.³⁶ *Lárentíus saga* is certainly rich in hagiographical elements and the bishop could have been a candidate for a saint. The example provokes a question why the authors of sagas about Þorlákr, Jón or Guðmundr did not use this kind of motif. One correct answer to this question would be difficult to find, the closest one perhaps being a different model of a holy prelate; 'holy' meaning also very pious and displaying particular merits, an issue which shall be discussed below on both clerical and lay examples.

Delimata *Dziecko w Polsce Średniowiecznej* concentrate on the saints' intervention in hopeless cases. In the literary context of a hagiography the phenomenon of "miraculous fertility", for instance, can be applied not only to cases when, after years of prayers, a child was born due to the intervention of saints. The parents', and especially the barren mother's, prayers might have resulted in the birth of a new saint. Infertile mothers were often stigmatized by society until the child's sanctity was proved—due to the perception of the mother's barrenness and infertility as a punishment for sins.

³³ Cormack, 'Visions, Demons and Gender'; Larrington, 'Leizla Rannveigar'; Swanson, *Religion and Devotion*; Joanna A. Skórzewska, 'Female assistance in holiness. A few episodes from the life of Guðmundr Arason (1161–1237)', in *Transformasjoner i vikingtid og norrøn middelalder. Medieval Crossroads 1* (2006), 197–217.

³⁴ The dreams were interpreted by "wise men", but the recipient of the visions was Máild herself. *Thomas saga erkibyskups: a life of archbishop Thomas Becket*, ed. by Eiríkr Magnússon, 2 vols (London: Longman, 1875–1883), I, ch. 3.

³⁵ *Lárentíus saga*, ch. 2. *Þorláks saga víðförla* mentions also Bishop Frederic whose mother had prophetic dreams concerning him; moreover, he used to consecrate water and, having returned to Saxony, finished his life "með háleitu heilagleik" (*Þorláks saga víðförla* I, ch. 4, and *Þorláks saga víðförla* II, chs. 2 and 9.)

³⁶ Right after he had been born, the baby boy showed no sign of life until the uncle of his father, Priest Þorarinrinn kaggi from Vellir/Svarfaðardalur, consecrated the newborn to St. Lárentíus whose feast day it was (*Lárentíus saga*, ch. 2).

Guðmundr's mother is treated rather instrumentally in the source material. The process of his birth itself is not miraculous in any way; the saint is just one of four children in that relationship. After the brief, somewhat ironic remark on her contribution to the household, Úlfheiðr is not extensively mentioned in *GP* or any other variant until the moment of her death in 1200. Lambkár does not write much about that event or Guðmundr's reaction. The only information provided by the sagas is that the saint was in Eyjafjörður at that time, and that her death took place while he was away from home.³⁷ Úlfheiðr's body was taken to Hólar and Bishop Brandr Sæmundsson received it "with loving care".³⁸ Úlfheiðr is not presented as a person who had any major impact on the saint's future. No divine message was delivered to or through her. She is depicted as an ordinary woman, practical and sensible, able to take care of herself and her closest family. However, Ari's absence put Úlfheiðr under his family's control and his death, which led to Guðmundr being fostered by his grandfather Þorgeirr, eliminated the woman from her son's life.

Thomas Becket's mother was not only the recipient of prophetic dreams, she was also the one to introduce religion to the future saint, just as Monica, the mother of Augustine, did to him.³⁹ The model of a mother who is the saint's first companion is certainly inspired by the image of the Virgin Mary, but takes the function of a care provider in a different direction: not only by being the vessel for prophetic dreams and signs about her child's future, but by actively introducing him to religion and scholarly education. As far as two other Icelandic saints are concerned, the role of their mothers is underlined, but they do not seem to have been the main actors either, though their role is quite interesting. Þorlákr's mother made a meaningful contribution to her son's future. It was she who took the future bishop of Skálholt to Oddi, the centre of learning, so that he might get his education, which was inspired "by both her wisdom/foresight and by God" ("af sinni vizku með guðs forsjá").⁴⁰ Jón's mother, Þorgerðr, did not receive any special visions or premonitions about her son's future directly,

³⁷ It is unclear where Guðmundr's home actually was at the time and where exactly his mother lived at the time when he travelled across the country and stayed in many different places during his priestly career. A few possibilities and reasons for them are discussed in 7.2.1. below.

³⁸ *GP*, ch. 18, *GA*, ch. 32, *GB*, ch. 52.

³⁹ *Augustinus saga*, ch. 3.

⁴⁰ Ch. 3. Jón Ögmundarson was given to Ísleifr Gizurarson into fosterage by his father, which is explicitly stated in the saga (*JS*, ch. 2). Ásdís Egilsdóttir, 'Mannfræði

but accidentally provoked others to prophesize about it. During a visit to Denmark, when she rebuked her little son, Queen Astrid told her “not to slap the future bishop’s hands”.⁴¹ A story from Þorgerðr’s own childhood has been quoted by the author of *Jóns saga* as one containing a prophecy about her son’s future. At the age of twelve (or eight according to the younger version), she came to Norway with her parents as her father was a member of Óláfr Haraldsson’s (d. 1028/30) retinue. One Christmas Eve, when the king saw the girl, he complemented Egill on his daughter’s looks and predicted that “the noblest Icelandic line would descend from her”.⁴² Thus, the king who himself in the following decades earned the status of the greatest northern European saint, recognized the nobility of holy descent from Jón Ögmundarsson’s future mother.

The role of fathers in saints’ lives was approached by medieval authors in a very different way. The fathers were frequently absent during early childhood, and later they often strongly disagreed with their children’s life choices, their piety, even asceticism. On the other hand, the child saints often refused to obey the parents’ commands and wishes. That model predominated in continental hagiographies from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries which offered a greater opportunity for both men and women to participate in social and religious life. It was also known from *vitae* describing the early Christians and martyrs.⁴³ *Martinus saga byskups* presents the father of the future bishop and saint as an opponent of his son who wanted to become a Christian and to devote himself to religion. Instead, Martin had to spend a few years in the military service. His father, a heathen, hoped to change the boy’s mind and convince him to become a soldier.⁴⁴

Höllu biskupsmöður’, in *Sagnaþing helgað Jónasi Kristjánssyni sjötugum. 10. apríl 1994* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1994), 11–8.

⁴¹ “[...] hendir þessar [...] eru byskups hendir” (*JS*, ch. 1).

⁴² “[...] sá mun göfgastr ættbogi á Íslandi, er frá henni kemr” (*JS*, ch. 1). That detail might have a double function: praising both Jón and Óláfr, also underlining the connection between the two saints. The popularity of foreign saints, and the way they are depicted in the Icelandic saints’ sagas are issues of great importance, which shall be demonstrated below.

⁴³ Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, p. 23. In general, little research can be found on this particular aspect, and the results presented by Weinstein and Bell are far from being satisfactory. In describing the childhood of European saints, they focus first of all on a few chosen examples taken from one specific area: southern Europe (Italy, France and Iberia) and Poland.

⁴⁴ *Martinus saga byskups* I, ch. 1; *Martinus saga byskups* II, ch. 1; *Martinus saga byskups* III, ch. 1.

Ari Þorgilsson did not have much influence upon Guðmundr's life, since he was absent for long periods of time. The man is certainly portrayed first of all as a soldier, loyal to his Norwegian superiors, specifically Jarl Erlingr Ormsson *skakki* (1115–1179). In 1163, after the victorious battle at Ré, he was “keen to return to Iceland” (although it is an assumption that the reason for his willingness to return to his homeland was a reunion with the family).⁴⁵ According to the laws (*Grágás*), a father was responsible for bringing up his children, both the legitimate and the illegitimate ones.⁴⁶ In fact, as much as two thirds of the responsibility belonged to him, and one third to the mother. This care and responsibility must, however, also have included the father's good reputation and making sure that the children would be taken care of in the event of his death. Ari Þorgilsson certainly managed to fulfil the obligation. According to the laws, the deceased's heirs were responsible for the cost of the children's upbringing. As an illegitimate child, Guðmundr was fostered by his grandfather when Ari was abroad, and the laws make it clear that paternal grandparents stood in line to inherit from the deceased before illegitimate children.⁴⁷

Ari died in Norway, on 2. November 1166, defending Jarl Erlingr *skakki*. The narratives describe it as a brave and dramatic death: “(...) Ari hljóp á milli jarld ok ófriðarmanna, sem hann setti sik skjöld fyrir jarl, ok sneri í mót hernum ok gaf svá jarli líf, at hann fann sik fyrir,—því at hann var áðr ekki sárr.”⁴⁸ Erlingr, having heard about the death of the Icelander, expressed his respect for him: “Þat er víst, at þar fór sá maðr, er oss hefir bezt fylgt, ok höfum vér engan jafnhvatan eftir. Ok varð hann einn búinn til af yðr at gefa sjálfviljandi líf sitt fyrir mitt líf. Nú mun ek eigi hans frændum launat fá þann skaða, sem þeir hafa beðit fyrir minar sakir.”⁴⁹ Indeed, no record is available of any kind of compensation, even a small material assistance for Ari's family. The

⁴⁵ “[...] fýstist Ari út hegat” (*GP*, ch. 2, the same sentence is used in *GA*, ch. 6 and *GB*, ch. 3).

⁴⁶ Nic Percivall, *Ideals, Masculinity and Inheritance: a Study of Father/Son Relationships Presented in the Narrative Sources of Iceland and Normandy in the Eleventh to Thirteenth Centuries*. An unpublished doctoral thesis defended at the University of Liverpool, 2005, p. 55.

⁴⁷ Percivall, *Ideals, Masculinity and Inheritance*, p. 56.

⁴⁸ “Ari dashed in between the Earl and his pursuers, placed himself as a shield before the Earl, turning to face the enemy. And so he gave his life for the Earl at the cost of his own, for until then he had been unharmed” (*GP*, ch. 2).

⁴⁹ “Without a doubt, the man who has just died served me most faithfully and no one is as brave as he. For he alone was ready to sacrifice his own life freely in order

one mentioned in the saga, however, must have had a metaphorical meaning from the start. Ari died a brave death, he also died for a religious man (who prayed together with all his men before the battle). It was from the beginning till the end a matter of honour, the narratives leave no doubt about that.

The relationship with parents was not the only factor determining the life of a saint. Details on the social position and the fate of the family members were often used by authors or omitted, depending on their usefulness for the biography. Arngrímr, the author of *GD*, omitted detailed information about various members of Guðmundr's family, but, of all the authors, he was the only one to make a comment on the saint's noble ancestry.⁵⁰ In his opinion, Guðmundr's family was known as the best one in the whole Iceland because they were "tried in courage and justice".⁵¹ This comment is most probably a conventional statement, used in order to glorify the protagonist's family and provide the proper background. However, Arngrímr might have been inspired by Ari's military career and possibly the presence of chieftains in Guðmundr's family. According to Orri Vésteinsson, Guðmundr *góði* was "of insignificant parentage but respectable ancestry".⁵² Not much information is left about Þorgeirr Hallason or the exact dimensions of his chieftaincy, but the narratives suggest that he was a respected man among the leading chiefs. Other connections, such as the aforementioned connection of Úlfheiðr to the Eyrbyggjar, is quite a strong argument as well. Still, it is rather farfetched to repeat after W. P. Ker that "there are few more honourable men in Icelandic history than those of Guðmundr's family".⁵³ Orri Vésteinsson's statement is rather difficult to accept as well; Úlfheiðr and Ari were not completely insignificant individuals, their social status being relatively high.

Both Guðmundr's father, Ari, and his uncle, Þorvarðr, were in close contact with Norwegian officials. Þorvarðr was a respected *skáld* in

to save mine. Nor is it now possible for me to compensate his kinsmen for the loss they have received on my account" (*GP*, ch. 2).

⁵⁰ Ari and Úlfheiðr are only introduced by name, and Ari's death for Jarl Erling is described in Einarr Gilsson's poem. The only remark made by Arngrímr is that Ari "er var framr maðr, féll vápnsóttir í Nóregi" (*GD*, ch. 4).

⁵¹ "Hann var svo góðrar ættar sem in bezta mátti kallast á öllu Íslandi, því at hans kynferð var reynd í röskleik ok réttvísi" (ch. 4).

⁵² Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland* 2000, p. 155. See also Benjamin Kristjánsson, 'Guðmundur biskup', pp. 347–9 and Ciklamini, 'Sainthood in the making', p. 57.

⁵³ Ker, 'Gudmund Arason', p. 92.

Iceland. He sailed to Norway at the age of eighteen. Shortly after his arrival he defended his honour in a fight against a man named Jón, King Ingi's courtier, thanks to which he gained in reputation and became a member of the court.⁵⁴ The whole incident is rather vaguely explained. It seems that the only reason for Þorvarðr's anger was the fact that Jón had left Eyjafjörður without him on board. The reason why King Ingi's courtier had stayed in Iceland is not revealed anywhere, nor is anything known about the length of the stay, not to mention his relation to Guðmundr's uncle. In general, Þorvarðr was an adventurous man and all the incidents he was involved in are "too numerous to be included in this saga".⁵⁵ His faithfulness to King Ingi is quite explicit: "king Ingi [...] had no equal".⁵⁶ After the king's death Þorvarðr returned to Iceland and did not want to serve any other monarch. None of the sagas provides any information about details on his Norwegian network except for the family connections. One of his daughters by Herdís Sighvatsdóttir, Guðný, had as her second husband Eiríkr Hákonarsson from the Orkneys, the nephew of Sigurðr *slembir* (who was killed in 1139 while fighting against king Ingi).⁵⁷

The news of Ari's death reached Iceland when Guðmundr was seven. It might be suggested that Guðmundr could not inherit his father's property because he was born out of wedlock, though it is only the authors of *GP* and of *GA* who state the fact that the inheritance was not possible, and therefore his kinsmen decided that he should become a priest.⁵⁸ The question of what exactly there was for Guðmundr to inherit is a very problematic one, and the fact that he was an illegitimate child did not help. It is difficult to establish whether Ari had a chieftaincy or would be entitled to one. In any case, laws suggest that the first heir of a deceased man was his legitimate son/sons, subsequently his legitimate daughters (Ari didn't have any), his father (Þorgeirr), his legitimate brothers by his father (Þorvarðr, Ingimundr,

⁵⁴ *GP*, ch. 1; *GA*, ch. 1.

⁵⁵ *GP*, ch. 1; *GA*, ch. 2.

⁵⁶ "honum þótti sem engi myndi hans jafningi verða" (*GP*, ch. 2; *GA*, ch. 4; *GB*, ch. 3).

⁵⁷ Her first husband was Þorgeirr, the son of Bishop Brandr (and the close friend of Guðmundr). Another daughter, Gyðríðr, married Kolbeinn Tumason. Helga, the second daughter Þorvarðr had with Yngvild, the daughter of Þorgils Oddason, was married to Chieftain Teitr Oddson at Hóf in Vopnafjörður (d. 1223), who also bore the title deacon (Genealogy 44). Altogether Þorvarðr had children with five different women.

⁵⁸ *GP*, ch. 4; *GA*, ch. 11; *GB*, ch. 9.

possibly also Einarr), etc.⁵⁹ As mentioned above, Þorgeirr Hallason became Guðmundr's fosterfather as soon as Ari left for Norway. If the chronology in *GP* is to be trusted, the chieftain decided to enter Þverá and retire to the monastery at about the time when the news of Ari's death reached Iceland (1168).⁶⁰ The fact that he chose living in a monastery for his retirement is not surprising. It has been suggested that as all the religious houses in Iceland were private in origin and chiefly families were the owners, it seems that monasteries were in some respect "retirement homes for the aristocrats".⁶¹ That Þorgeirr chose this particular monastery, however, is another issue: its location seems to be a reasonable explanation here. Munkaþverá was the closest religious house to Hvassafell and it is not known how many years Þorgeirr spent there or what kind of political/familial connections (shared land?) were behind his decision. During his life he was, after all, a respectable chieftain and must have had certain influences in that area. Thus, Þorvarðr and Ingimundr took over their father's farm after he had entered the monastery, and Ingimundr became Guðmundr's foster father. Later on, as it will be shown, the brothers parted, but were in touch all the time and shared to a great extent their responsibility/control over the boy, and, probably, all the family matters.

Both Þorvarðr and Ingimundr were Þorgeirr's legitimate sons by Hallbera, so were two other uncles mentioned by *Guðmundar sögur*; and they all, in theory, stood in line to inherit after Ari. If anything was left to them by Þorgeirr, they all had the right to compete. The chronology of particular stages of the Þorgeirsson brothers' lives is unknown. Þorvarðr, some time after his return to Iceland, became a monk, most probably at Munkaþverá, and died there in 1207⁶²; Þórðr, the third son of Þorgeirr and Hallbera, also became a monk at Munkaþverá, and nothing else is known about him other than that he died childless.⁶³ Ingimundr, Guðmundr's foster father, pursued a clerical career and

⁵⁹ *Grágás* 1, pp. 218–9.

⁶⁰ The chronology of Þorgeirr's death seems to be slightly dubious—according to *Genealogy* 40, he died in 1169. According to *GP* the date of his death would be 1171. Also, it is difficult to assess whether the news of Ari's death reached Iceland before Þorgeirr's entry into the monastery or not. If so, his decision would have a more symbolic meaning.

⁶¹ Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland* 2000, p. 133.

⁶² The information is only found in annals (*Annales regii* and *Skálholtsannáll*) where Þorvarðr is referred to as a monk. However, the fact that he retired to Munkaþverá is only a hypothesis.

⁶³ *GP*, ch. 1. According to *GA*, ch. 2 his name was Þórir.

does not seem to have had any permanent place of his own where he would dwell for longer periods of time after having been married for less than two years to Sigríðr Tumadóttir (of Ásbirningar).⁶⁴ He did not leave any offspring and died in Greenland where his ship crashed, but that happened after Guðmundr had been ordained a priest. The fifth of the Þorgeirsson brothers, Einarr, also died in Greenland after a ship accident, although not in the same year. Unfortunately, since no information on that individual or his journey is extant in any source, it is hard to determine his position in the family.

A considerable amount of the family finances might have been donated to Þverá with Þorgeirr's entrance into the monastery. During the Commonwealth period Icelandic chieftains did not seem to follow any special rules as far as the inheritance of a chieftaincy by one of their sons was concerned: primogeniture or legitimacy did not seem to be prevailing issues here.⁶⁵ After the fall of the Free State legitimacy carried much more importance.⁶⁶ An illegitimate child was the financial responsibility of the father until the age of sixteen, and new laws permitted them to inherit in the absence of other heirs. Nevertheless, the texts suggest two things. Ingimundr must have had some small fortune at his disposal, and it is possible that as Guðmundr's foster father he received some of it from Þorgeirr. However, Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson seems to be the one who had received some part of the inheritance that was actually meant for Guðmundr. This issue is specifically mentioned in the conversation Guðmundr has with Þorvarðr as a grown up man and a bishop-elect. Þorvarðr demands obedience from his nephew; he presents himself as the head of their family, and mentions that all the other kinsmen had submitted to his judgment. Guðmundr

⁶⁴ Genealogy 34. She was Kolbeinn Tumason's stepsister. After the separation (*GP*, ch. 4) with Ingimundr she became the wife of Sigurðr Ormsson. There is no other reason given than "þau Sigríðr nýttu ekki af samförum", and though they moved to Ás in Skagafjörður to live for some time with Sigríðr's father (perhaps in order to receive some advice or prove that the marriage was not successful), the relationship did not last. They finally parted when Guðmundr was twelve (*GP*, ch. 4; *GA*, ch. 13; *GB*, ch. 12).

⁶⁵ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Chieftains and Power*; Nic Percivall, *Affection Tempered by Pragmatism? The Favouritism Practiced by Icelandic Chieftains in the Selection of Heirs in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries up to the End of the Commonwealth*. An unpublished MPh thesis defended at the University of Oslo, 2000 and *Ideals, Masculinity and Inheritance*.

⁶⁶ The issue of legitimacy as the right to inherit is explicitly stated in *Járnsíða*, the 'Erfðatal' section, ch. 1.

in return accuses his uncle of depriving him of the chance to inherit his patrimony.⁶⁷ Also Einarr Gilsson's poem in *GD* says: "Then the man [Guðmundr] took his inheritance" ("Þá tók [Guðmundr] arf").⁶⁸ However, in this case it is tempting to conclude that the author meant either Guðmundr's resemblance to his father in temper, or the priestly career and charisma "inherited" from his foster father, which shall be demonstrated below.

The actual influence which parents and foster parents had on the saints' personality and life choices is hardly possible to measure on the basis of the hagiographical texts. Many European hagiographies provide extreme examples of the parental conduct which was supposed to influence the holiness of their child, such as *Nikolaus saga*, where the pious parents decided to only have one child and remained chaste after his birth.⁶⁹ The *vitae* of bishops or Church Fathers composed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries usually stressed the noble parentage of the saints, but their actual influence on the children's lives has been treated very individually. The good parentage and appropriate family connections are mentioned in the *vitae* of both Þorlákr and Jón, and are not missing in Guðmundr's biography either. As far as significant influence on his future life is concerned, however, his foster father seems to have earned much more credit.

2.3. *Upbringing and education*

In medieval hagiographies all across Europe the loss of one or both parents is equally quite common, thereby increasing the desire to secure a substitute parent within the church.⁷⁰ Most often, the boy followed his uncle into the episcopate after apprenticeship as a canon, archdeacon and dean of the cathedral to which his uncle was attached. It was common practice among the upper classes to send the younger son, who

⁶⁷ *GP*, ch. 25

⁶⁸ Ch. 4.

⁶⁹ *Nikolaus saga erkibyskups* I, ch. 1; *Nikolaus saga erkibyskups* II, ch. 23.

⁷⁰ Goodich, *Vita perfecta*, p. 109. Bernardine McCreesh argues that clerical career was quite a popular solution for young Icelanders from good families who found themselves in difficult circumstances, which indeed can be supported by many examples from the sagas of the Icelandic bishops (McCreesh, B., 'The Birth, Childhood and Adolescence' in *Youth and Age in the Medieval North, The Northern World. North Europe and the Baltic c. 400–1700 AD, Peoples, Economies and Cultures* 42, ed. by Shannon Lewis-Simpson (Leiden. Boston: Brill, 2008), p. 91).

had been marked out for an ecclesiastical career, to his mother's brother for rearing.⁷¹ *GD* agrees with that tradition by stating that Guðmundr was taken care of by his mother's relatives.⁷² Arngrímr's assumption that the Icelandic audience should accept this information is difficult to understand, as in all the other (presumably well known at the time) variants of Guðmundr's biography it was Ingimundr Þorgeirsson, the paternal uncle, who fostered him after his father's death. Thus, the changed detail might be another detail pointing at international readers and listeners, who were not familiar with the previously written narratives.

The fact that Guðmundr entered a new stage of life at the age of seven might be a coincidence here, but according to medieval standards the number would be rather significant. The seventh year symbolized the end of younger childhood (*infantia*) and the beginning of adolescence, during which the individual's character would form.⁷³ Ari Þorgeirsson, though hardly ever present in his son's life, has left some legacy in the family. Seven year old Guðmundr "resembled his father in overbearing temperament" and it took him a while before he became a pious enthusiast of books like his uncle and foster father Ingimundr:

[...] ok fekk honum þat fyrst í föðurbætr ok erfð, at hann var barðr til bækr. Hann var ólatr mjök, ok þótti þá þat þegar auðsýnt á athöfn hans, at honum myndi í kyn kippa um ódæld, því at hann vildi ráða, við hvern sem hann átti. En fyrir þat var fóstari hans við hann harðr⁷⁴

The saga variants differ at this point. According to *GD*, the saint's behaviour was very humble towards his teachers (interestingly enough, the author uses the plural form and Ingimundr is not mentioned here at all):

⁷¹ Goodich, *Vita perfecta*, p. 91. See e.g. the cases of Angelo of Furci or Thomas Cantilupe.

⁷² "Var því Guðmundr uppfæddr með móðurfrændum sínum" (ch. 4). Little information is available about them (*GP* ch. 1 and *GA* ch. 3).

⁷³ This was, most probably, related to the loss of milk teeth, but perhaps also to the magical number seven. According to Polish and Czech custom it was the time of the ritual cutting of a boy's hair. It was a sign of his coming under the father's protection, and the father would be the one to do it. That custom was also observed in other countries, though its meaning seems to be slightly different (Delimata, *Dziecko w Polsce Średniowiecznej*, pp. 104–9).

⁷⁴ "The immediate first-fruits he received from his patrimony was to be beaten to his books. He was very stubborn and soon showed that he resembled his father in overbearing temperament and would seek to have his own way. Ingimund was equally determined to keep him on a tight rein." (*GP*, ch. 4; *GA*, ch. 11; *GB*, ch. 9).

Þegar til bækr settir á skilningar aldri, hlýðinn ok auðmjúkr sínum meistara sem öllum öðrum, er honum vildu gott kenna, því at sú er röksamlig regla ritninganna, at engi risi fyrr upp til meistaradóms yfir aðra menn en hann sat áðr hlýðinn lærisveinn fyrir sins meistara fótum⁷⁵

Already those descriptions of the early years of a saint demonstrate the hagiographers' struggle between depicting the protagonist as "fully human" and, at the same time, confirming his otherness.⁷⁶ Arngrímr Brandsson found the model of *puer senex* more suitable for the saint. He might have hoped to improve the chances of achieving the canonization of Guðmundr if he presented a man nearly ideal from his early years. He must also have been familiar with the *vitae* of other Icelandic saints (or saints known in Iceland) who were proclaimed diligent students, and preferred to use the same pattern. The depictions of child saints frequently oscillated between the normal and the extraordinary. Many hagiographies present a model which portrays holy men and women consistently as children who are free from sin and close to perfection, while according to others young saints do not reveal any particular traits. Þorlákr Þórhallsson has been depicted as an ideal child, quiet, reserved and eager to learn from the earliest years.⁷⁷ Jón Ögmundarson has been presented as a diligent pupil and a good child as well.⁷⁸ Also many other Icelandic bishops who never achieved the status of officially recognized saints have been depicted as unusually good children: Páll Jónsson (bp. 1195–1211), Lárentíus Kálfsson and Árni Þorláksson.⁷⁹ One detail that shows an important difference between Jón and Þorlákr concerns their likeness to their peers: while Þorlákr was "unlike most young men" ("ólíkr flestum ungum mönnum"), Jón behaved "the way children usually do" ("sem jafnan er barnanna

⁷⁵ "He was put to study having reached the age of understanding, compliant and humble towards his tutors as much as towards all the other ones who wished to teach him well, because such is the true rule of the Scripture [which says] that nobody raises to the level of the master above other men except for the one who humbly sits at the feet of his tutor". The opening part of the quotation has been, as Stefán Karlsson claims, taken from *Nikuláus saga* (Stefán Karlsson, 'Guðmundar sögur biskups', p. 167).

⁷⁶ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 30.

⁷⁷ ÞA, ch. 2 and B, ch. 2.

⁷⁸ JS, chs. 1 and 2.

⁷⁹ The issue has been discussed *i.a.* by McCreesh, "The Birth, Childhood and Adolescence". The fact that the majority of the examples can be found in the sagas of the Skálholt bishops can be attributed to a different model of an ideal prelate which was preferred in the southern diocese.

hátttr”) when he reached for food on the table without permission.⁸⁰ Although the quoted descriptions refer to different stages of life, the sources present quite a similar, yet not identical model of a sinless and quiet child, contrary to the portrait of Guðmundr, as shown in other passages referring to the later stages of his life. However, like many other saints and saintly prelates, he was a child marked by a portent.⁸¹ After Guðmundr’s confirmation he moved with his uncle Ingimundr to Háls, and after two years’ time to Vaglar, a neighbouring site, where Ingimundr set up a house (while Þorvarðr moved to Háls). This time, when both Þorgeirsson brothers were neighbours, Guðmundr and his cousin Ögmundr played together a lot, and their games revealed their knowledge of their destiny:

Þá áttu þeir Guðmundr ok Ögmundr barnleika saman ok margt annat ungmenni með þeim. En til ins sama atferlis kom jafnan um leik þeira, hvat sem first var upp tekit, at Guðmundi var ger mítra ok bagall ok messuföt, kirkja ok altari,—ok skyldi hann vera biskup í leiknum,—en Ögmundi öx ok skjöldr ok vápn,—ok skyldi hann vera hermaðr. Þótti mönnum þat vera fyrirspá mikil, þá er þat kom fram um hvárn þeira, sem ætlat var.⁸²

The inspiration must have come from the *vitae* of the famous holy bishops who from their earliest years demonstrated the consciousness of their future. According to *Ambrosius saga*, for instance, the saint, being still a child, used to stretch his hand out and ask his sister to kiss it the way people kissed the hands of priests and bishops.⁸³ The author of *GD* Arngrímur Brandsson noted that St. Athanasius reportedly played a bishop exactly in the same way Guðmundr did.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ JS, ch. 1.

⁸¹ Weinstein & Bell, *Saints and Society*, p. 26 and McCreesh, ‘The Birth, Childhood and Adolescence’, p. 89.

⁸² “Guðmund and Ögmund (Þorvarð’s son) played often together with many other youngsters but, whatever game they played, it always ended the same way: Guðmund was given a mitre, crozier, vestments, church and altar to play the bishop, while Ögmund played the soldier with axe, shield, and weapons. Later on, when each of them actually followed their careers in later life, these childhood incidents were construed as significant prophecies” (*GP*, ch. 4; *GA*, ch. 12; *GB*, ch. 11).

⁸³ “Nu ser hann optliga, at kystar ero hendr byskupa edr presta af lægrum monnum; nu ok I leik sinum rettir hann framm hond sina ok bidr systur sina kyssa ser a hond. Spadi þat því fyrir, er framm kom sidar i hans lifi” (*Ambrosius saga byskups*, ch. 2).

⁸⁴ “ungr Athanasius stóð með bagal ok mítru” (*GD*, ch. 4). It is uncertain how well the legend/*vita* of Athanasius was known in Iceland, no cult of that holy prelate is documented.

Ingimundr, a priest of excellent reputation, proved to be the closest person to the boy, available to take care of Guðmundr's clerical career.⁸⁵ He never had any children himself and is depicted in the early sources as perfectly fit to be Guðmundr's foster father. The image of Guðmundr as a stubborn child, as favoured by the majority of authors, leaves no doubt that the priest had to work hard on teaching the future saint some discipline and respect. The procedure of punishment and rigorous upbringing was widely known in medieval Europe. Ambrose of Milan, Vincent of Beauvais (1190–1264) and Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) were among the thinkers who considered corporal punishment an integral part of both intellectual and physical education.⁸⁶ They found it necessary in order to teach the children right from wrong, the respect for universal norms and, also, for those responsible for their upbringing: fathers, foster fathers and teachers, etc. Others, like Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), were strongly against severe punishment; at least when practiced more often than verbal persuasion, since it might provoke the opposite effect.⁸⁷ The paragraphs from the Old Christian Law section of *Grágás* that refer to the training of priests advise that if the boy will not learn, he should be put to other work and chastised at that only in such a way that he suffers no illness or lasting injury.⁸⁸ According to the picture of him given in the sagas, Ingimundr was certainly far from causing his nephew any harm.

The motif of scholarly learning is present in numerous Western European *vitae*. This kind of education gained strong approval of papacy in the twelfth century, and became law at the Third Lateran Council in 1179.⁸⁹ Studies were valued highly in the upper echelons of the Icelandic society, and the sagas of Icelandic bishops especially argue for the benefits of scholarly education of the clergy. This encouragement of the scholarly education of the clergy was to a great extent

⁸⁵ "Prestr ok mikít göfugmenni" (GP, ch. 1; GA, ch. 2).

⁸⁶ Delimata, *Dziecko w Polsce Średniowiecznej* pp. 102–3; Michael Goodich, 'Encyclopaedic literature: child-rearing in the Middle Ages', in *Lives and Miracles of the Saints. Studies in Medieval Latin Hagiography*, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 1–8.

⁸⁷ *Vita sancti Anselmi auctore Eadmerus Cantuariensis monacho, sancti Anselmi discipulo et comite individuo*, PL, vol. 158, col. 67.

⁸⁸ "Nu vill sueinninn æigi nema ok leiðiz bok. þa skal færa hann til annaRra werka ok Ráða honum sua til at huarki werði örkuml ne ilit." (K 8, 'at læra prest til kirkju').

⁸⁹ Delhay, P. 'L'organisation scolaire du XII^e siècle', *Traditio* 5 (1947), 211–68, pp. 259–60.

promoted by the Victorines, the regular canons of the former abbey of St. Victor in Paris, where Þorlákr Þórhallsson studied. He was the first Icelandic bishop to travel such a long way to study, and allegedly also spent some time in Lincoln, England. He was not the first Icelandic prelate to study abroad though, as Ísleifr Gizurarson (bp. 1056–1080) and his son, Gizurr Ísleifsson (bp. 1082–1118), were educated in Saxony.⁹⁰ The majority of the Icelandic bishops were, however, educated in Iceland, as few would be able to afford the expense of a few years in England and France.⁹¹ Still, the model of educating the clergy by their foster fathers, *nota bene* clerics and chieftains, was changing. The foundation of clerical learning centres in the country, including cathedral schools at Hólar and Skálholt, provided more and more of the future prelates with strictly clerical, organized studies.

The praise of the future prelates during their childhood and adolescence frequently focus on their love of learning. This concerns not only the officially recognized saints, but many other bishops, although the holy prelates reveal first and foremost interest in ecclesiastical knowledge. Þorlákr Þórhallsson learned the psalter at an early age, Páll Jónsson was good at memorization and scholarly at a young age, and Árni Þorláksson has been described as skilful at many disciplines, including carving in wood.⁹² Bernardine McCreesh has observed that none of the Hólar bishops seems to have been as “obviously precocious” as the Skálholt bishops; moreover, while the majority of the prelates from the southern diocese demonstrate innate learning, the knowledge of the bishops of Hólar is of the acquired type, through hard work.⁹³ She argues that the more realistic portrait of the bishops from the northern diocese is caused by the fact that the sagas about them were written down very soon after their deaths and, thus, based on “actual memories” (which is quite a challenging view).⁹⁴ McCreesh notes that Jón’s harp-playing and Lárentius’s ability to compose Latin verse appear in young adulthood rather than childhood, while Guðmundr’s fundamental change also took place during his adolescence. Perhaps placing “the age of understanding” (interpreted more broadly) in later

⁹⁰ Genealogy 7.

⁹¹ Þorlákr’s studies, for instance, must have been financed by his powerful relatives, the Oddaverjar (Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland* 2000, p. 152).

⁹² *Árna saga*, ch. 2.; *ÞA*, ch. 2.; *ÞB*, ch. 2.; *Páls saga*, ch. 1.

⁹³ McCreesh, ‘The Birth, Childhood and Adolescence’, p. 94.

⁹⁴ McCreesh, ‘The Birth, Childhood and Adolescence’, p. 94.

years and a different way of learning simply reveals a different model of a prelate? The question is whether the construction of a different model of a holy prelate resulted from the time span, or whether it was a deliberate tactic of the authors; a certain rivalry between dioceses should be taken into consideration here.

CHAPTER THREE

ADOLESCENCE AND FIRST STEPS TOWARDS A CLERICAL CAREER

Guðmundr Arason's adolescence was the period of time which might be considered his proper formative years. The record of a fundamental change in the saint's life classifies his case among hagiographies according to which the saints really understood their vocation as adults.¹ According to numerous remarks in the narratives, Guðmundr's metamorphosis also caused changes in the Icelandic religiosity thanks to the innovations he introduced. The relations with different social groups began to take shape during the years of his priesthood (1185–1203), which is essential for understanding the saint's status during the years of his episcopacy.

No less important than the support of allies from different social classes for Guðmundr's position as a trustworthy clergyman was a symbolic assistance of the deceased Icelandic holy bishops in whose translations he participated. Perhaps even more vital at the beginning of Guðmundr's priestly career was the company of his uncle, Ingimundr Þorgeirsson, and a close friend, Þorgeirr Brandsson, which had an impact on Guðmundr's priestly career and saintliness. "Guðmundr always had friends", wrote W. P. Ker.² This chapter presents the impact which the saint's first close friend had on shaping his character. Both Ingimundr and Þorgeirr provided him with education and guidance in his clerical career, but also in spiritual experiences, without which, as the saga authors claim, the saint would have been a considerably different person.

3.1. *The first ordination*

At the age of twelve Guðmundr received the tonsure from Bishop Brandr Sæmundarson and became an acolyte. Other ordinations soon

¹ Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, pp. 100–20.

² Ker, 'Gudmund Arason', p. 333.

followed: a year later he was ordained a sub-deacon and at the age of fourteen a deacon (*messudjárn*, those ordinations were done by Bishop Brandr as well).³

In the northern part of medieval Europe, being a deacon in the twelfth century meant nothing more than having one (the last but one, in fact) of the seven ordination grades all young men had to go through in order to become priests. The ordination for deacon was a rite during which a bishop would put his hands on the candidate's head and pray to the Holy Spirit using the formula *Accipe Spiritum Sanctum* ("Receive the Holy Spirit"). At the same time the bishop would hand him the Gospels and dress him in a stole and a dalmatica that belonged to the vestments. The age limit varied, and (in most parts of Europe) celibacy was required.⁴ Sub-deacon was a lower grade, from the high Middle Ages classified as one of *ordines maiores*, where celibacy was also demanded, at least in theory.⁵

At the time when he received his first ordination Guðmundr reached the so-called age of reason (*rationabilis aetas*), perhaps the most important stage of *pueritia*, at which a boy/young man was allowed to participate in legal procedures and get married. This was also the time of proper education (in every meaning of the word), getting prepared to enter society and become a part of it. The age boundary was not firmly settled, some medieval thinkers suggesting twelve,⁶ others fourteen.⁷ Else Mundal claims that in Northern Europe the age boundary has never been explicitly defined, but it is the age of twelve that seems to mark it in many cases, though one should not define anyone below twelve as a child or anyone above twelve as an adult.⁸ Nevertheless, since that stage of life was commonly known as "the age

³ GP, ch. 5; GA, ch. 13; GB, ch. 14. GD only mentions his two consecrations: "Herra Brandr setr sína vígslu hönd yfir hinn góða Guðmund, þegar hann hefir tólf ár [acolyte], ok þaðan fram sem tímar lofast; vígist hann þá lesdjárn" (ch. 5).

⁴ Pirinen, Kauko, 'Diakon', in KLMN III, 51–2.

⁵ Dahlerup, Troels, 'Subdiakon', in KLMN III, 52–3.

⁶ Hieronymus, *Translatio homiliarum* XXXIX *Origenis in Evangelium Lucae*, 18, 19, PL, vol. 26.

⁷ Gratian, *Concordia discordantium canonum*, c. 22, q. 5, c. 15, PL, vol. 187; see also *Caroli Magni Capitularia*, PL, vol. 97. Delimata, *Dziecko w Polsce Średniowiecznej*, p. 32 suggests again that it might have been related to the meaning of number 7.

⁸ Mundal, 'Forholdet mellom born og foreldre', p. 10, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 'Börn og gamalmenni á þjóðveldisöld', in *Yfir Íslandsála: Afmælisrit til heiðurs Magnúsi Stefánssyni sextugum 25. desember 1991*, ed. by Gunnar Karlsson and Helgi Þorláksson (Reykjavík: Sögufraeðslusjóður, 1991), 111–30.

of reason”, certain expectations towards Guðmundr as a responsible individual were raised by the society and by the hagiographers. Most of the saga variants, however, concentrate on facts and events other than the saint’s features of character at that point. Extensive descriptions of that kind are generally missing. Still, the fact that Guðmundr attended horse fights or enjoyed gossiping with other clerics during a service contributes to the image of an average young Iclander.⁹ This is quite different from that of other future bishops, for instance Árni Þorláksson, who after injuring his knee decided to never again participate in a dance or other game. He maintained that the accident was a punishment for his participation in this kind of improper entertainment.¹⁰ It is doubtful that a similar experience would evoke the same kind of reaction in Guðmundr. Even *GD*, which provides a more elaborate study of the teenage saint, underlines his strong character:

Var hann þegar hvass í hugviti ok glöggrar greinar bæði til bækr ok brjóstvitru, ei síðr til veraldar ok lands laga, ef hann hefði þat viljat faga. Þegar í æsku var hann gildrar lundar, eigi gjarn at afleggja sitt mál, þótt við aflamun væri at etja, sem enn mun síðar greint verða. Mjök ástúðigr var hann bæði frændum ok vinum, svá at borð var honum til reiðu með gleði húsbónda, hvar hann vildi hafa.¹¹

This description confirms the positive image of the young man, and even his pride and stubbornness are presented here as desirable features. In this particular paragraph Arngrímr Brandsson agrees with other authors that Guðmundr was far from being a calm and quiet type, but focuses on his intellect. What is more, Arngrímr is also the only author to describe the looks of the saint: “short rather than of medium height, sturdy, broad-faced and with a friendly countenance”.¹² Being the most remote to Guðmundr in time (and, therefore, least likely to be familiar with his appearance), Arngrímr does not seem to be convincing as the authority on the saint’s looks. However, he was aware

⁹ (*GP*, ch. 9; *GA*, ch. 20; *GB*, ch. 19) and (*GP*, ch. 7; and *GA*, ch. 16; *GB*, ch. 16).

¹⁰ *Árna saga*, ch. 2.

¹¹ “He was sharp-minded and clever at interpreting both books and the common knowledge, no less the laws of the world and Iceland, if he were willing to practice them. Proud already as a child, never willing to give up his goals even if he had to fight against odds, as shall be told later. He was very amiable towards his relatives and friends, the farmers gladly offered him maintenance wherever he needed it” (*GD*, ch. 5).

¹² “[...] heldr lægri en meðalmaðr og þykkr í vextinum, breiðlaginn í ásjónu og eigi langleitr, æ með hryrligu yfirbragði” (*GD*, ch. 16).

of the importance of images in spreading a new cult, which “helped to familiarize the faithful with new faces” and “made it possible to identify intercessors when they appeared in a dream or vision”, as André Vauchez has observed.¹³ Arngrím’s description may be based on the record of an actual image circulating in the society, which is possible, though not very likely. All the northern churches which had Guðmundr’s image listed in their fourteenth century inventories had acquired them approximately in the second half of that century, at almost the same time when *GD* was written.¹⁴

In the spring of 1180, when the saint was nineteen years old, his uncle Ingimundr arranged a voyage overseas and took his foster son with him. The weather was hostile and one night the ship was suddenly driven close to breakers. Those dramatic circumstances provoked a dialogue between Ingimundr and the crew. It could be perceived as a typical polemic between a priest and average men who turn to faith in a moment of crisis; though a clear anti-Norwegian attitude is also noticeable here:

Þeir svöruðu: “Þá muntu vilja, prestr, heita með oss suðrgöngu ok öðrum stórheitum, því at nú mun ekki annat stoða.”

“Víst eigi,”—segir prestr,—ek mun heita, ef ræð, hverju heita skal. En ella mun ek taka máli fyrir alla íslenzka menn þá er á skipi eru, at alls engi mun í heitum með yðr vera, því at ek vil nú eigi heldr yðra forsjá fyrir mér en þér hafið viljat mína forsjá í haust¹⁵

Though it is not known how many Icelanders were aboard with them, Ingimundr acted as a conscientious clergyman willing to make a vow that would affect all the people praying for survival: “I wish to make a vow by Almighty God and the Holy Cross, by the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the Saints, that we give a tenth part of everything that comes ashore to the churches or to the poor as the Bishop sees fit”.¹⁶

¹³ Vauchez, *Sainthood in the later Middle Ages*, p. 452.

¹⁴ See 8.4.3. and Appendix 7 below.

¹⁵ “They answered him: “Then will you join us in making vows to undertake a pilgrimage and other penances—for nothing else can help us now? “Certainly not,” said the priest, “I will only make a vow if I am allowed to decide what that vow shall be, otherwise I must assure you on behalf of all the Icelanders on board that not one of them shall support the vows you make; I can no more submit to your counsel now than you did to my advice last autumn.” (*GP*, ch. 6; *GA*, ch. 14; *GB*, ch. 15).

¹⁶ “Ek vil heita á allsvaldanda guð ok helgan kross ok frú sanctam Mariam ok alla helga at gefa tíunda hlut af öllu því, er á land kemr, til kirkna eða fátækum mönnum eftir ráði biskups” (*GP*, ch. 6; *GA*, ch. 14; *GB*, ch. 15). The author of *GB* omitted the words “Holy Cross” in the vow.

Since they were still on Icelandic territory, it was most certainly the Icelandic churches or the Icelandic poor that would, at least in theory, benefit from that vow.

The argument did not stop there, however. The crew agreed to Ingimundr's demands but they made it clear that it was done only because the time and place were not right to argue any longer. Still, the captain continued to challenge Ingimundr and started a dispute on the highest name of God. Four men were involved, and it was one of them who eventually gave the answer to this question (which is, apparently, not mentioned in the text), as Ingimundr found the discussion inappropriate and refused to get involved in it.¹⁷ Arguments between Norwegians and Icelanders aboard ships are a very well known motif from medieval Icelandic literature.¹⁸ There are also many examples of the ostracism of Icelanders who had joined a *hirð*, the Norwegian king's retinue. A common theme is teasing or testing their sense of honour, as in the case of Ari Þorgeirsson, who in rebutting fake accusations of cowardice, stayed in Norway instead of returning to Iceland and died for Erlingr *skakki*. Though the sagas under consideration are hagiographic material, the pseudo-theological dispute was not what concerned the authors most. The goal seems to have been the presentation of Ingimundr as a man of faith and honour.

When the ship reached the safe harbour in Þaralátursfjörður, Ingimundr noticed two things: Guðmundr had badly injured his right foot, and a chest full of valuable books was missing.¹⁹ Still, instead of despairing, he prayed to thank God for sparing their lives. The priest then remembered a dream in which he had seen their encounter with the breakers and a glad reception from Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson.²⁰ Guðmundr interpreted that scene as an "Arch wonder", obviously representing their survival. On the following day Guðmundr's injury was discussed by the crew. Since the boy was looked upon as a burden, a man called Bersi *valbráð* (whose nationality is unknown)

¹⁷ Hallsteinn *stýrimann*, Þórðr *kráka*, Þorbjörn *humla* and Einarr *nefja*—all presumably Norwegian; only Þórðr is mentioned in name index/*Sts* II as one (p. 457) *GP*, ch. 6; *GA*, ch. 14; *GB*, ch. 15.

¹⁸ Else Mundal, 'Framveksten av den islandske identiteten, dei norske rætene og forholdet til Noreg', in *Collegium Medievale* 1–2 (1997), 7–29 (pp. 22–3).

¹⁹ "[...] ok var fótrinn brotinn á bátsborðinu svá smátt sem skeljamoli, ok horfðu þangat tær sem hæll skyldi" (*GP*, ch. 6; *GA*, ch. 14 and *GB*, ch. 15).

²⁰ *GP*, ch. 6. In *GA*, ch. 14 and *GB*, ch. 15 it was Magnús Ámundason who had dreamt about them.

suggested throwing the boy overboard to get rid of the problem, to which Þórarinn *rosti* strongly objected. Together with Einarr *nefja* they carried Guðmundr to the shore, where help was obtained. A poor man, who lived there, Snorri Arngeirsson, had a reputation as a doctor. He took the boy to his house and did his best to cure him.²¹ Arngrímr Brandsson has used Guðmundr's accident in *GD* in order to demonstrate his holiness again. The author emphasized the boy's bravery in bearing the injury in order to get a reward in another life.²² This opportunity was used by him in order to make a short comment on the misfortunes to come; an experience like this would strengthen the saint and prepare him for other difficult situations.

Guðmundr stayed with Snorri as Ingimundr continued travelling: having found his chest of books intact at Drangar, he went there to get them dried. In late autumn he journeyed back to check Guðmundr's condition and, seeing progress, went south to Breiðabólstaður in Steingrímsfjörður where he stayed with Priest Jón Brandsson (d. 1211) and his wife, who was Ingimundr's niece, Steinunn Sturludóttir.²³ Guðmundr joined him there for Easter 1181.²⁴ After Easter Guðmundr and Ingimundr left for Hólar in Reykjaness²⁵ to meet priest Helgi Skeljungsson who was known as an excellent doctor ("inn mesti lækni"), as Guðmundr's foot was still in a bad state. Helgi was willing to heal him and did it so successfully, so that after the Removal Days (21 May 1181) Guðmundr returned to Breiðabólstaður.²⁶

In the summer, an interesting event took place: Bishop Þorlákur Þórhallsson (d. 1193) made his first visitation to the West Fjords, and came to Kálfanes in Steingrímsfjörður to consecrate a newly built church there. Ingimundr went to the ceremony together with his foster son, who did not behave properly. Guðmundr preferred to gossip

²¹ GA adds that Snorri was "hinn meste lækni".

²² "[...] bar hann þetta allt með megnu hugskoti, þvíat hann vissi vel, at þann sem vairs herra miskunn mæðir í þessum heimi, hefir hann disponerat at gjöra sinn hægri handar son í andligu lífi, þvíat sá veit gjörst, er greinir alla hluti, hvár skriptin er léttbærri" (*GD*, ch. 5).

²³ Genealogy 18. She was the daughter of Guðmundr's aunt and Ingimundr's sister, Ingibjörg Þorgeirsdóttir.

²⁴ Jón, d. 25 May 1211, was from the Staðarmenn in Steingrímsfjörður (Genealogy 28).

²⁵ "á Hóla á Reykjaness" (*GP*, ch. 6), "a Reykja hola a Reykja nes" (*GA*, ch. 14), "a Reykja hola" (*GB*, ch. 16).

²⁶ The author of *GP* includes in the text a detailed description of the treatment: "En brátt er hann kemr þangat, baker Helgi fótinn mjök, ok drógu tveir karlar beinit með töngu, áðr brott gengi" (ch. 6. *GA*, ch. 14; *GB*, ch. 16).

with the bishop's clerks rather than attend the service. His uncle, however, told him to do so, using a convincing argument: "Who knows when such knowledge will come in useful. Believe me, anyone who wishes to learn can do no better than learn from the man who is about to perform these functions here today".²⁷ It was a prophetic comment suggesting that Guðmundr was going to become a bishop himself and perform such services.

Not only conducting a service, but also exercising the right judgment in spiritual and mundane cases was demanded from a medieval Icelandic cleric. Guðmundr's wisdom, or rather the ability to seek the right way to solve difficult matters is demonstrated in the presentation of a legal case he was asked to lead. In winter 1182/83 a man named Guðmundr Bjarnarson was killed at Kleifar in Gilsfjörður. Jón Brandsson, his friend, asked his holy namesake to lead the prosecution of the case. The suspect, a man introduced as Koll-Oddr,²⁸ was charged with full outlawry, but Jón Húnröðarson offered him protection.²⁹ The court of execution was held at Staðarhóll, and afterwards Guðmundr went first to Breiðabólstaður to see Ingimundr, and then to Hvammur, to visit his kinsman Sturla and ask him for help in finding the outlaw.³⁰ Unfortunately, upon Guðmundr's arrival the chieftain was on his deathbed, and so the future bishop had to decide on his own how to save his honour, execute the full penalty, and do nothing against the religious code.³¹ The authors used here a solution reminiscent of the *deus ex machina* effect: God supported Guðmundr "by putting ideas into his mind".³²

In return, he vowed to give God all the wealth he might receive if the case were solved so that the case would be brought to an end

²⁷ "[...] eigi veit, hverr til slíks þarf at taka. En ek hygg, sá er nema þarf, at eigi muni færi á gefa at nema at betra manni en þeim, sem nú skal þetta embætti fremja hér" (*GP*, ch. 7; and *GA*, ch. 16; *GB*, ch. 16).

²⁸ "Toll-Oddr", according to *GA*, ch. 17.

²⁹ He was of Húnröðlingar/Hvammverjar in Vatnsdalur, Genealogy 32.

³⁰ *GP*, ch. 8; *GA* makes this journey more complex, and says that, having visited Ingimundr, Guðmundr went north to Skagafjörður to meet his friends and relatives. Only afterwards did he go to Hvammr to see Sturla (ch. 17); *GB*, ch. 18.

³¹ "[...] enda legði hann eigi á sik þá ábyrgð, at hann týndi í því vígslum sínum ok kennimannsskap"—a nearly identical statement is to be found in *GP*, *GA* and *GB*. The word *kennimannsskap* is used here as a general statement, referring to Guðmundr being a cleric, a learned man, as the event is recorded before his ordination as priest.

³² "Ok gefr sá honum ráðit, er honum veitti, er almuðr guð er".

without peril to his soul.³³ His wish was granted: Þorgrímr *alíkarl*, Guðmundr's friend and foster brother, invited him during their meeting at Þingeyrar to attend a horse-fight at Vatnsendi in Vesturhóp.³⁴ He expected to encounter the outlaw and his supporters, but decided to go anyway, hoping to receive God's protection.³⁵ Koll-Oddr was there with his protector and a large following. Jón Húnröðarson's nephew started an argument with the suspect. That led to a fight in which the latter accidentally killed Jón's son. Many others, including Koll-Oddr himself, were wounded. The author of *GP* clearly interpreted the event as God's revenge on behalf of Guðmundr watching over the saint so that he would not participate in any way or get hurt.³⁶ His opponents, however, were punished.

Guðmundr spent winter 1183/4 at Reynistaður in Skagafjörður, with Þorgeirr Brandsson, the son of Bishop Brandr Sæmundarson.³⁷ They became such good friends that, as the sagas report, it seemed to Guðmundr that nobody had ever shown him as much affection as Þorgeirr.³⁸ Þorgeirr supported Guðmundr when the Vatnsendi incident was brought to court: in the spring of 1184 Þórðr Ívarsson brought a lawsuit against Jón Húnröðason for wounding his servant Þoroddr during the fight. Bishop Brandr was in charge of the outcome and backed Þórðr's lawsuit. Thanks to Þorgeirr's pleading, Guðmundr's dispute was also included in the judgment. The peace settlement took place at Ásgeirsá, after the general assembly in the summer,³⁹ and Guðmundr spent the rest of the year with Þorgeirr and Ingimundr at Reynistaður. Those months were the last months of "internship" for Guðmundr. The years when little responsibility was expected from him were over, as the opening years of his priesthood were going to reveal.

³³ "[...] honum yrði eigi at sáluháská" (*GP*, ch. 8; *GA*, ch. 17; *GB*, ch. 18).

³⁴ Þorgrímr Vigfússon *alíkarl* from Möðruvellir (Genealogy 37). The phrase reads: "vinr hans ok fóstbróðir" (*GP*, ch. 9; *GA*, ch. 20; *GB*, ch. 19).

³⁵ "[...] ok mun guð til gæta" (*GP*, ch. 9; *GA*, ch. 20; *GB*, ch. 19).

³⁶ "Nú fór Guðmundr við þat af mannamóti, at guð hefndi óvinjum hans" (*GP*, ch. 9; *GA*, ch. 20; *GB*, ch. 19).

³⁷ Name index/*Sts* II, p. 461 introduces him as "líklega goðorðsmaður".

³⁸ "[...] hefði engi maðr óskyldr jafngóðr þótt sem Þorgeirr" (*GP*, ch. 9; *GA*, ch. 20; *GB*, ch. 19).

³⁹ Guðmundr was absent, since after the general assembly he went to Nes to attend a feast with Magnús Ámundason and Þorfinnr (who later became abbot). The priest Gellir Höskuldsson was with Guðmundr (*GP*, ch. 10; *GA*, ch. 22; *GB*, ch. 20).

3.2. *The second ordination and events that followed*

The spring of 1185 is presented in the older saga material as a prelude to significant events in Guðmundr's biography. Þorgeirr Brandsson gave up his farm and started planning a journey to Norway. Also Ingimundr, Guðmundr's foster father, decided to leave for Norway. During Lent Bishop Brandr ordained Guðmundr Arason a priest "four nights after the Feast of St. Gregory" (16 March).⁴⁰ Ingimundr gave him all his best books and did not abandon his foster son until he was established.⁴¹ When everything was settled, the two men who were closest to Guðmundr left for Norway.

The reason for Ingimundr's journey is not explicitly stated anywhere in the sagas, but it might have been a visit to Archbishop Eysteinn. It is quite possible that Þorgeirr went there with the same goal in mind. What kind of matters they intended to discuss is not certain. The archbishop was an active clergyman: he revised the Frostathing Law, formed the provincial statutes, worked on liturgical books, entered into a close alliance with the royal power and provided the Church and the see with vital privileges. An active leader of the see and of the whole province, Eysteinn was very much interested in ordering Icelandic matters.⁴² In order to achieve this, he started with the rearrangement of the status of the chieftains.⁴³ The archbishop demanded two things from them: first, to dispose of their rights to the churches they had built in accordance with Canon Law. Second, the chieftains were supposed to respect the institution of marriage and stop keeping concubines. In Eysteinn's famous letter to the Icelandic bishops, he demanded from the chieftains compensation for what they had done to the king and his people, which clearly was a remark on his support

⁴⁰ "Þetta vár um langaföstu var Guðmundr vígdr til prests af Brandi biskupi fjórum nóttum eftir Gregoríusmessu" (*GP*, ch. 11; *GA*, ch. 23; *GB*, ch. 21)/ "er Guðmundr vígðist til prests í heilagri Hóla kirkju á laugardag næsta fyrir Passionem domini, fjórum náttum eptir Festum beati Gregorii páfa" (*GD*, ch. 6).

⁴¹ In *GD* his assistance and the gift are omitted.

⁴² Bagge, 'Den heroiske tid-', p. 71, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 'Island og Nidaros', in *Ecclesia Nidrosiensis 1153-1537. Søkelys på Nidaroskirkens og Nidarosprovinsens historie*, ed. by Steinar Imsen (Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk Forlag), 121-42.

⁴³ See Eysteinn's letters from 1173 (*DI* I, 38.) and from 1180 (*DI* I, 54). *DI* I, 38. is an exceptional document, not only being the earliest letter of the archbishop to the Icelanders, but also being the first verbal assault on the so-called "church of goðar" (Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 'Island og Nidaros', p. 123).

for royal power.⁴⁴ The archbishop's devout supporter in this process was the bishop of Skálhólt, Þorlákr Þórhallsson, who began the struggle for the Church's privileges in Iceland.⁴⁵

The demonstration of Guðmundr's family ties and contacts to individuals who were involved in Church politics or who were just the faithful members of the hierarchy are of special importance for his sainthood and ecclesiastical career. They represent two different approaches: active/provocative, and passive/meditative. The reformers Þorlákr Þórhallsson and Eysteinn Erlendsson represented the "fighting" Church. Ingimundr, Guðmundr's foster father and tutor was a charismatic priest, who might also have had inclinations to support Þorlákr and Eysteinn's views. He certainly was an active type of clergyman, well prepared to discuss theological matters in a direct confrontation. Guðmundr's best friend Þorgeirr was the son of the current bishop at Hólar. He appears to have been a rather quiet type, and would probably have become a priest or bishop who avoided conflicts with, for example, powerful laymen fighting for their rights. Guðmundr's grandfather Þorgeirr and the other uncle Þórðr defined their devotion to the Church by donating money and entering a monastery. Even though one of them had been a chieftain, he would most probably not have represented the "fighting" Church. All those individuals contributed to Guðmundr's future development as a man, a clergyman, and a saint in different ways, and so did those two different attitudes.

During his two-year long stay in Norway Þorgeirr Brandsson was hosted by Archbishop Eysteinn while Ingimundr Þorgeirsson had lodgings in town and was granted the use of St. John's chapel. Ingimundr spent all the feast-days with the archbishop "who showed him great favour".⁴⁶ He also performed services at the Church of Mary in Staðr.⁴⁷ The archbishop, as the narratives report, highly valued the priest's knowledge and even intended to ordain him the bishop of Greenland, but Ingimundr humbly refused.⁴⁸ He continued his priestly career in

⁴⁴ Gunnes, *Erkebiskop Øystein*, pp. 242–3. The letter from 1173 is of concern here.

⁴⁵ Especially letters from 1179 (*DI* I, 53) and 1180 (*DI* I, 54).

⁴⁶ "[...] ok hafði góða virðing af honum" (*GP*, ch. 11; *GA*, ch. 23), "ok var þar mikils virðr" (*GB*, ch. 21).

⁴⁷ Staður í Staðarbyggð (Stadsbygden) í Þrandheimi (*Sts* I, p. 548, ft. 2 to ch. 11).

⁴⁸ *GP*, ch. 11. Since no other reasons are mentioned, it is most probably a traditional motif of humble refusal, well known from all the stories about noble bishops, that has been used here. Jon, King Sverre's foster son, was consecrated as bishop of Greenland instead (shortly before the archbishop's death, *GP*, ch. 12, *GA*, ch. 24; *GB*, ch. 21).

Bergen and also became involved in mercantile transactions.⁴⁹ The last event from his life reported in the sources is the unfortunate voyage back to Iceland whose end is rather mysterious:

Skip þeira kom í óbyggir á Grænlandi, ok týndust menn allir. En þess varð svá vist, at fjórtán vetrum síðar fannst skip þeira, ok þá fundust sjau menn í helliskúta einum. Þar var Ingimundr prestur. Hann var heill ok ófúinn ok svá klæði hans, en sex manna bein váru þar hjá honum. Vax var ok þar hjá honum ok rúnar þær, er sögðu atburð um líflát þeira. En þetta þótti mönnum mikil merki, hvé guði hafði líkat atferð Ingimundar prests, er hann skyldi svá lengi legit hafa úti með heilum líkam ok ósköddum.⁵⁰

This description has already caused some discussion and is still quite difficult to interpret: was the author trying to imply Ingimundr's holiness? If yes, what is the purpose of that tactic? Without doubt, *GP* gives the reader a rather solid account of Ingimundr's life, though the suggestion of naming this part of the saga *Ingimundar þáttur Þorgeirssonar* would perhaps be too farfetched.⁵¹ The author's goal was supposedly to portray Ingimundr as an excellent priest (even a candidate for bishop) and a well-read man of strong social position who was not afraid to express his opinion on particular matters. He was an ideal example for his nephew to follow, although Guðmundr's path towards respect and saintly reputation was different. It is striking that the authors chose such an unconventional way to describe Ingimundr's end; of all the corpses found in Greenland after the disaster his body was the only one that was found uncorrupted.⁵² But an even more surprising fact is that an account of Ingimundr's brother, Einarr, is nearly identical.

⁴⁹ *GP*, chs. 12–3; *GA*, chs. 28–9; and *GB*, chs. 24–6.

⁵⁰ “Their ship was on the deserted shores of Greenland and they all perished. This came to light fourteen years later when their ship was found and the remains of seven men in a cave. Ingimund the priest was one of them: the skeletons of the other six were by his side. They also found a wax tablet close to him with runes that told the story of their death. Most men thought this a signal mark of God's favour towards the life and conduct of Ingimund the priest that his body should have laid so long exposed without injury or corruption” (*GP*, ch. 13; *GA*, ch. 29; *GB*, ch. 27).

⁵¹ The title was suggested by Jan Ragnar Hagland, ‘Ingimundr prestur Þorgeirsson and Icelandic Runic Literacy in the Twelfth Century’, *Alvismál*, 6 (1996), 99–108.

⁵² The motif of the uncorrupted body is a known one in medieval hagiographical material, see e.g. Arnold Angenendt, ‘Relics and their veneration in the Middle Ages’, in *The Invention of Saintliness*, ed. by Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker. Routledge Studies in Medieval Religion and Culture, ed. by George Ferzoco and Carolyn Muessig (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 27–37 (p. 30), and Vauchez, *Sainthood in the later Middle Ages*, pp. 427–43.

The first of Þorgeirr Hallason's children "lost his life in the wastelands of Greenland [...] it [his body] was intact and uncorrupted and is now buried on Herjólfssnes".⁵³ Neither the date of his death nor the purpose of the voyage is known, though there is little possibility that the two Þorgeirsson brothers died at the same time. Einarr is not mentioned elsewhere in the saga and nothing more is known about him. However, the authors of *GP* and *GA* admit that their version of what had happened in Greenland is only one of the two that used to exist, which is quite intriguing. It is unknown who the distinguished historian quoted by the author really was since all the available information is his name, Styrkár Sigmundarson, and the fact that he came from Greenland.⁵⁴

The death of Einarr Þorgeirsson is problematic to interpret. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it may be said that the image of Guðmundr Arason's family presents the "proper" background for the subject of a hagiography. Einarr could not have been left unnoticed in this fine selection of strong secular leaders and devoted Christians, though it is hard to answer with certainty to why the saga authors chose this kind of story to describe his death. Possibly the interplay of supernatural and natural elements was invented to keep the balance between the religious vocation and the secular success in order to create the impression that the saint was born into an outstanding family.⁵⁵

3.3. *The death of Þorgeirr Brandsson and Guðmundr's metamorphosis*

In many medieval hagiographies, during the period of adolescence a religious transformation (very often a conversion) was usually regarded as a "unifying and joyful awakening".⁵⁶ It may sometimes have been associated with hallucinatory experiences and drastic behavioural changes. The largest number of such conversions among the saints occurs before the age of twenty; in men, between sixteen and nineteen; in women, between thirteen and sixteen. Guðmundr's "awakening"

⁵³ "[...] fékk líflát á Grænlandi í óbyggðum [...] Lík Einars var heilt ok ósakat, ok hvílir hann á Herjólfssnesi" (*GP*, ch. 1; *GA*, ch. 1).

⁵⁴ "[...] sögn Styrkárs Sigmundarsonar af Grænlandi—ok var hann sagnamaðr mikill ok sannfróðr" (*GP*, ch. 1; *GA*, ch.1).

⁵⁵ See pp. 52–3 and Ciklamini, 'Sainthood in the Making', pp. 57–9.

⁵⁶ Goodich, *Vita perfecta*, p. 111.

took place at a later stage of his life and was far from being a joyful experience.

The saint's closest friend, Þorgeirr Brandsson, stayed with Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson in Norway until the following summer (1186), and then left for Iceland. During the voyage he fell ill and was bed-ridden when the ship reached Iceland. His sickness worsened, and two nights before the First Feast of Virgin Mary (13 August) Þorgeirr died. His corpse was brought to Hólar and it was only then that his father, Bishop Brandr, found out about his son's death. According to the author of *GP*, it was a severe blow to his friends and kinsmen, and an event that especially influenced the life of priest Guðmundr Arason:

Ok svá segir Guðmundr Arason at hann hefði einskis manns þess misst, er honum þætti jafnmikit at missa. Ok þat fell honum svá nær, at nálíga mátti kalla, at hann skiptist í allan mann annan (...) gerðist þá svá mikill trúmaðr í bænahaldi ok tíðagerð ok örlæti ok harðlífi, at sumum mönnum þótti halda við vanstilli, ok ætluðu, at hann myndi eigi bera mega allt saman, harðlífi sitt ok óyndi af andláti Þorgeirs.⁵⁷

The *A* and *B* variants of Guðmundr's *vita* agree with *GP* that Þorgeirr Brandsson's death marked a decisive moment in the saint's life. He seems to have gone through a personal crisis and, to a certain degree, a conversion or a spiritual awakening. Guðmundr's second ordination and parting with his foster father was his first step towards independent thought and action. But it was the death of Þorgeirr that caused the major change in his life, not his ordinations, not the parting with Ingimundr, or even Ingimundr's death. This change turned Guðmundr into a devout clergyman and developed the features that later gave him the nickname "the Good": he became especially focused on charity and spent hours praying, often at nights. Apparently, the priest's self-discipline was so severe that it became questionable whether he would be able to bear it. However, to counterbalance that image of an ascetic another important feature was added by the hagiographers: Guðmundr's interest in the education of his students, reading and

⁵⁷ "Guðmund Arason has said that no man's death had ever affected him as acutely as this one; indeed, so strong was his affection for Þorgeir that after his death Guðmundr's nature was significantly altered [...] he devoted himself so completely to prayers, divine services, acts of charity, and severe self-discipline that it seemed to others that he would not be able to sustain this excessive rigor, and they feared that he would succumb to the severities of his practices and his sorrow at Þorgeir's death" (*GP*, ch. 11; *GA*, ch. 25; *GB*, ch. 22).

writing. Also his eagerness to acquire the knowledge imported from abroad has been underlined in this context.⁵⁸ No evidence of any of Guðmundr Arason's writings has survived, on their own or as references in other sources, and none of the sagas specifies what kind of innovations Guðmundr introduced as a priest. The references to the use of relics and the consecration of wells that appear later in the text suggests that they were among the things introduced by him at that time.

On the other hand, the authors seem to have been aware of the fact that according to "the common opinion" ("þóttust menn mestan") Guðmundr's change had already taken place after the accident at Strandir. Since that event his conduct had improved successively year by year. Moreover, the texts also suggest the spiritual support of the foster-father for Guðmundr at this point.⁵⁹ Lambkárr Þorgilsson, as well as the authors of *GA* and *GB*, noticed that during this transformation Guðmundr performed services during which signs occurred: once a flame came out of his mouth during a prayer, another time a bird appeared on his shoulder.⁶⁰ Those signs were most appreciated by average people ("alþýðu manna"), as there were many who, being poor and in need, received both material and spiritual support from the saint.⁶¹ Others, like Bishop Brandr Sæmundarson, on the other hand, demonstrated ill will towards Guðmundr. Brandr claimed all the books and vestments which the priest had received from his uncle,

⁵⁸ "Hann rannsakaði bækr manna ok hendi af hvers bókum, þar er hann kemr, slíkt, er hann hafði eigi áðr [...] Marga hluti tók hann þá upp til trú sér, er engi maðr vissi áðr, at neinn maðr hefði nent áðr hér á landi" (*GP*, ch. 11; *GA*, ch. 25; *GB*, ch. 22). Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir discusses the potential reading material that the authors might have considered in this context: *Cura pastoralis* and *Dialogues* by Gregory, possibly some works by Bernard of Clairvaux (Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, 'Að kenna og rita', pp. 232–3). See also Régis Boyer, 'The influence of Pope Gregory's *Dialogues* on Old Icelandic Literature', in *Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference, University of Edinburgh, 1971*, ed. by Peter Foote, Hermann Pálsson, and Desmond Slay (London: The Viking Society for Northern Research University College, 1973), 1–27.

⁵⁹ "Því at þá unði hann sér hvárki nótt né dag, þar til er hann hitti fóstora sinn. Ok kom þaðan frá við nökkut á hverjum missirum til siðabótar honum" (*GP*, ch. 11; *GA*, ch 25; *GB*, ch 22; *GD*, as mentioned above, has excluded Ingimundr from any significant event in Guðmundr's life).

⁶⁰ *GP* ch. 14; *GA* ch. 30; *GB* ch. 28; *GD* ch. 7.

⁶¹ "Ok því fór fram hvert ár, at eytt var kaupi því öllu, er hann tók á vetrinn, ok gaf hann þat til matar ok klæða fátækum mönnum ok frændum sínum. Ok váru þat sjau ómagar, er hann fæddi með þessu" (*GP*, ch. 11; *GA*, ch 25; *GB*, ch 22).

Ingimundr, on the occasion of his ordination.⁶² It is not stated whether Guðmundr eventually gave Brandr his “heritage” or not, but it is clear that the disagreement did no harm to Guðmundr as far as public opinion was concerned, since his acts were so memorable. He had enough support from people and refused to give up his original ideas.

As in many previously discussed aspects, the author of the youngest saga disagrees about the fundamental change in Guðmundr’s life. Arngrímr’s image of the beginnings of his priestly career is different from that presented by other authors in their material. He has not devoted any particular attention to Ingimundr or Þorgeirr as Guðmundr’s close companions and individuals who had influenced him. The change in his lifestyle is not referred to in Arngrímr’s saga at all, and the detailed presentation of the priest’s good deeds as well as pious activities is just a plain statement.⁶³ When added to Arngrímr’s description of Guðmundr’s childhood and youth, it fits the image of a holy man, almost infallible and predestined to sanctity from the day of his birth. As Stefán Karlsson has observed, in *GD* Guðmundr’s habit of confessing his sins as often as possible is not mentioned at all. “In view of the spotless image of Guðmundr that is presented right from his childhood, he could not be expected to have any sins to confess.”⁶⁴ This is another example confirming that Arngrímr wished to create the image of Guðmundr as a saint of universal dimension and emphasize his person at the cost of those characters who accompanied him. The charisma of Ingimundr might have potentially outshone that of Guðmundr: the evolution of the saint’s personality under the influence of his uncle would have contradicted the image of “saint by birth”.

3.4. *Participation in the translatio process*

In 1191 a man named Sumarliði Ásmundarson⁶⁵ was killed, and Guðmundr’s first cousin, Snorri Grímsson (d. autumn 1208),⁶⁶ was accused of participation in the intrigue. Bishop Brandr, who involved himself in the lawsuit, acted against Snorri for his plotting and aiding

⁶² *GP*, ch. 11; *GA*, ch 25; *GB*, ch 22.

⁶³ *GD*, ch. 7, in particular pp. 165–167.

⁶⁴ Stefán Karlsson, ‘Guðmundar sögur biskups’, p. 167.

⁶⁵ Á Tjörn (name index/*Sts* II, p. 445).

⁶⁶ Of Reynistaðarmenn, a subdeacon (name index/*Sts* II, p. 438).

(although it was a man named Brandr Örnólfsson who was responsible for the killing). Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson, however, acquitted Snorri of the charge thanks to Guðmundr's and "other notable men's" pleading.⁶⁷ Guðmundr's good relationship with Bishop Þorlákr has been indicated rather than extensively reported by the saga author. He was still a deacon during the bishop's first visit to the West Fjords, and it seems unlikely that they actually developed any acquaintance. No special bond is accentuated between the two holy men until the *translatio* of Þorlákr's bones. The bishop died two years after Sumarliði's case. The *Guðmundar sögur* mention visions that a northern priest Þorvaldr *lundi* reported to priest Ormr Eyjólfsson, a former chaplain of Þorlákr, who was staying with Bishop Brandr at Hólar at the time.⁶⁸ The message was sent to Priest Guðmundr Arason at once, who decided the account was the proof of Þorlákr's saintliness.⁶⁹ Thanks to Guðmundr's efforts the deceased bishop of Skálholt was much called on in the north, as *Guðmundar sögur* imply.⁷⁰ Soon afterwards Bishop Brandr sent Bishop Páll Jónsson of Skálholt a letter reporting visions and miracles attributed to Þorlákr. Both Brandr and Guðmundr were sent for to participate in the translation and Guðmundr was given a particular role during the ceremony:

En í þjónustugerð þeiri, er þar var gerð guði til dýrðar ok ínum sæla Þorláki biskupi, þá setti Páll biskup Guðmund Arason næst þeim biskupunum í allri þeiri þjónustu—ok létu hann þerra kistunni með sér, er hon var í kirkju borin. Ok hann réð mjök fyrir, hvat sungit var, er heilagr dómrinn var upp tekinn.⁷¹

It is unclear why Páll, the new bishop of Skálholt, would choose Guðmundr of all the Icelandic priests to perform this role. His merits

⁶⁷ "Margra annarra merkra manna" (*GP*, ch. 15; *GA*, ch. 37; *GB*, ch. 31).

⁶⁸ *GA*, ch. 57; *GB*, chs. 40 and 42. In *GD* the context is not very clear, and it is hard to deduce whether he was Þorlákr's or Páll's chaplain (*GD*, ch. 27). According to *ÞA* and *B* Þorlákr supposedly appeared to a priest named Þorvaldr four years after his death and announced that the weather would get better after the *translatio* of his relics (*ÞA*, chs. 20–22; *ÞB*, ch. 41).

⁶⁹ "Þorlákr byskup var inn helgasti maðr" (*GA*, ch. 57; *GB*, ch. 40; *GD*, ch. 27).

⁷⁰ *GA*, ch. 57; *GB*, ch. 40.

⁷¹ "During the ceremony held in honor of God and the blessed Bishop Þorlák, Bishop Páll placed Guðmundr next to the bishop's throne at all the services and allowed Guðmundr to share with him the ceremony of opening the coffin, when it was carried into the church. Indeed, it was Guðmundr who really decided what words were sung when the holy relics were taken from the ground" (*GP*, ch. 17; *GA*, ch. 63; *GB*, ch. 42).

and good performance of the priestly duties might have been decisive, as the author suggests, although the right connections through family and friends could have mattered just as much. The sources on St. Þorlákr, however, do not emphasize Guðmundr's participation in the *translatio*. The oldest version of *Þorláks saga* only mentions him among the men who gathered at Skálholt. Priest Þorvaldr's message is not underlined as the decisive one either, and no remark in the context of the *translatio* indicates that northerners were especially devout to Þorlákr.⁷² Only *Jarteinabók Þorláks byskups önnur* mentions a few miracle stories that were, reportedly, dictated to Gunnlaugr Leifsson by Guðmundr Arason, which again points at his role in Þorlákr's cult.⁷³

The *translatio* of Jón Ögmundarson's bones and Guðmundr's participation in it is another important stage in the saint's biography. During the severe winter of 1199/1200 Bishop Jón of Hólar appeared to many people in their dreams and advised that the weather would improve if his relics were exhumed.⁷⁴ Having heard this, Bishop Brandr sent for Guðmundr to supervise the ceremony as he himself was in poor health. In the summer 1200 the Feast of Bishop Jón was made legal at the general assembly "because of the petitions of Bishop Brandr and the eloquent plea that Guðmundr made".⁷⁵ *Guðmundar sögur* report also that the exhumation of Bishop Jón's relics was accompanied by miracles. Again, the main source on the saint whose relics were translated is less generous in referring to Guðmundr's participation; *Jóns saga* mentions it very briefly.⁷⁶

Hagiographers have often listed translations and the "discovery" (or rather rediscovery) of long forgotten relics among other achievements of their protagonists. Ambrose, with whom Guðmundr has been compared many times, initiated three translations. The deceased saints themselves informed the bishop about the site of their burial and

⁷² ÞA, ch. 82. A source which does contain the statement that confirms Þorlákr's popularity in the north is *Páls saga*: "Þá birti almáttigr Guð dýrð hans ok heilagleik, fyrst fyrir norðan land en síðan um allt Ísland ok öll lönd önnur, þau er í nánd váru" (ch. 6).

⁷³ "Vitranir þær, er Guðmundr prestr, er síðan var byskup, sendi Gunnlaugi múnk, at hann skyldi dikta, mun ek skyndiliga yfir fara" (ch. 171).

⁷⁴ GP, ch. 18; GA, ch. 76; GB, ch. 49.

⁷⁵ "[...] at bæn Brand biskups ok tölu Guðmundar prests" (GP, ch. 18; GA, ch. 79; GB, ch. 53).

⁷⁶ Chs. 51 and 31.

about the necessity to exhume their bones.⁷⁷ Ambrose's role was, thus, much more impressive than Guðmundr's, both because of the period of time in which he lived and because of his rank: the saints were martyrs whose burial place was unknown at the time and Ambrose was already a bishop when the visionary dreams occurred. Guðmundr's participation in the translations of Jón and Þorlákr, although more modest than Ambrose's, was very important for his career and saintliness. The passages that refer to those events underline that both clerics and laymen had lots of respect for him.

GP, *GA* and *GB* add another incident that would confirm the respect that the bishop of Skálholt had for Guðmundr. In spring 1201 a nun [anchoress] called Ketilbjörg died on the night of Guðmundr's arrival at Skálholt.⁷⁸ Bishop Páll asked Guðmundr to lead the chant over her body, while he himself and Gizurr Hallsson (d. 1206) assisted at the vigil.⁷⁹ Guðmundr's conducting of this service was memorable. In his oration over Ketilbjörg's grave, Gizurr admitted that he had never heard anything like that before and that the excellent service was the right testimony to her sanctity.⁸⁰ This passage is also a testimony to Guðmundr's skills as a clergyman and his ability to promote the saintliness of various individuals: saintliness that is officially acknowledged through the translations of relics and records of miracles, but also saintliness revealed through extraordinary piety cultivated in seclusion, such as that represented by Ketilbjörg.

Guðmundr's testimony to the sanctity of other individuals would be repaid many times by the support of deceased saints and other men and women who proclaimed him a saint. Those pronouncements considered his conduct and piety, but also supported the image of a miracle worker whose reputation was to a large extent based on wonders, many of which took place during his lifetime.

⁷⁷ Gervase and Protase (*Ambrosius saga*, ch. 6), Vitalis and Agricola (*Ambrosius saga*, ch. 17), and Nazarius (*Ambrosius saga*, ch. 18). Also in *Gregorius saga* the *translatio* of Sebastian and Agatha is mentioned, but it is not quite clear whether the initiative came from Gregory (*Gregorius saga*, ch. 13).

⁷⁸ Although the word used here is *nunna* she was most probably an anchoress, just like Hildir at Hólar mentioned in *Jóns saga* (see *Sts* I, p. 549, ft. 20). According to *GP* the event took place in 1201, and at that time the only nunnery in Iceland was that at Kirkjubær (1186–1551). The issue is discussed in detail in 6.2. below.

⁷⁹ Of Haukdælir; a king's marshal (*stallari*), chieftain (*goðorðsmaður*), lawman (1181–1202), deacon and author (name index/*Sts* II, p. 386).

⁸⁰ *GP*, ch. 20; *GA*, ch. 89; *GB*, ch. 60; *GD*, ch. 16.

CHAPTER FOUR

IN VITA MIRACLES; THE MEANS, THE PERFORMANCE AND THE CRITICISM

4.1. *Guðmundr's priesthood (1185–1203)*

4.1.1. *The use of relics in miracle making*

In the twelfth century, hagiographers showed that supernatural power worked in saints according to the accepted patterns of sanctity known from the life of Christ and the Apostles.¹ The parallels are not drawn exactly, since the claim of the saints was not to be great men themselves, but deputies of Christ to whom he had promised power. Ward writes,

when such miracles were attributed to the saints, however, they were not described precisely as in the life of Christ. Where Christ healed the sick directly, saints made the sign of the cross, invoked the Trinity, prayed, or used objects, especially water²

This biblical pattern is certainly already present in Guðmundr Arason's miracle stories during his priesthood. The total number of the events examined is around forty. The majority of the miracles overlap in particular versions, but the way they are presented and interpreted varies sometimes quite significantly from text to text. The concept of miracle as presented by the authors of particular narratives is more or less uniform and agrees with the concept presented by Anselm of Canterbury and Peter Abelard. Unlike events that happen by nature or by the will of men, miracles are caused by the direct intervention of God in affairs. This direct intervention occurs through a saint.

The order in which the miracle stories appear in particular sagas varies: in *GP* all the miracles are recorded after the *translatio* of Þorlákr's and Jón's remains, which might suggest the support of the two saints for Guðmundr. As Patrick Geary has observed, the saints' corpses were "security deposits left by the saints upon their deaths as guarantees of

¹ Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind*, pp. 166–8.

² Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind*, p. 170.

their continuing interest in the earthly community”.³ For Guðmundr, Jón and Þorlákr’s relics secured both the well-being of the community (especially in curative miracles) and strengthened his saintly as well as clerical reputation. The pattern is different in *biskupa sögur*; in *GA*, *GB* and *GD* a substantial number of miracles (non existent in *GP*) appear long before Þorlákr’s death:

- an insane woman was cured with water consecrated by Guðmundr,
- an elderly woman who fell asleep during a service in a church at Vellir was woken up by an apparition of a man,
- a church door unlocked of its own accord, a tabernacle in the church at Vellir did the same, old twigs bloomed during the service when during the cleaning of a chalice a few drops of water fell on them,
- a young girl named Una survived a snow storm thanks to Guðmundr’s coat,
- the saint healed his good friend Kálfr’s sore throat,
- a fire at Hólar was extinguished with consecrated water,
- a man named Ófeigr had his eyes cured.

It is explicitly stated that many wonderful things occurred thanks to Guðmundr’s blessings, consecrations and prayers, and that statement is recorded before the account of Þorlákr’s *translatio*.⁴ Water consecrated by the saint plays quite an important role in those stories, but otherwise miracles were either the result of Guðmundr’s prayers or his good intentions (Una’s case).

Although the authors of *GA*, *GB* and *GD* have listed some miracles before the translations of Jón’s and Þorlákr’s remains, that certainly does not diminish the effect of those processes on Guðmundr’s miracle working. The miracles grow in number and complexity after the two translations. Those that appear in *GP* after Jón’s *translatio* appear also in *GA* and *GB* in the same order. *GD* has a different order of the miracle stories as well as different content.⁵ Still, in this variant certain regularity can also be noticed: since some stories involving the use of “relics” are listed before the translations but after the death of both

³ Geary, *Living with the Dead*, p. 202.

⁴ “[...] urdu fleiri hlutir nýtsamligir ok merkiligir [...] af yfirsöngum hans ok vatnvígslum ok brunnarvígslum ok öðrum vígslum” *GA*, ch. 27.

⁵ *GD* pays more attention to a thematic grouping of miracles rather than chronology (Hunt, *A Study of Authorial Perspective*, p. 91).

Jón and Þorlákr, one might either assume the use of some imported relics or the use of *brandea*, secondary relics, such as clothes previously belonging to the saints. *Þorlákr's saga* does mention the fact that the bishop's hair clippings were preserved with care after the burial, so the use of primary relics cannot, after all, be completely excluded either. Moreover, the C variant of *Þorlákr's saga* contains the following passage:

Páll byskup miðlaði þegar við marga helga dóma af klæðum ins sæla Þorláks byskups, við Brand byskup, Jón ábóta, Sæmund bróður sinn, Guðmund prest inn góða ok marga aðra. Margir lögðu ok á kistu Þorláks byskups belti sín, lérept ok marga hluti aðra, ok var af því mikill ilmr.⁶

The clothes, most probably rather expensive and in relatively good state, might have been worn by some members of the clergy mentioned above. However, it is also likely that they were used as relics by Guðmundr. It is difficult to estimate the exact number and identity of relics in twelfth-century Iceland other than that recorded in the sagas of the Icelandic holy bishops and miracle collections.⁷ Church inventories list a *skrin* (reliquary) in a church at Miðarnarbæli under Eyjafjöll (1179)⁸ and Helgafell monastery (about 1186),⁹ but it is not known what they contained.

The sagas of the bishops, as well as the native miracle stories datable to the period of Guðmundr's priesthood, provide quite a complex image of the circulation of different types of relics, such as a linen cloth that lay on Þorlákr's coffin,¹⁰ small amounts of soil from Þorlákr's grave¹¹ or some oil previously consecrated by him.¹² It is interesting to notice

⁶ "Bishop Páll distributed the relics of blessed Þorlákr's clothes among many men: Bishop Brandr, Abbott Jón, his brother Sæmundr, Priest Guðmundr the Good, and many others. Many laid their belts on Bishop Þorlákr's coffin, also linen and a number of other items, which gave them a strong fragrance" (ch. 64). It might be a reference to the cult of St. Martin. Martin's clothes are mentioned in his saga as a relic, possibly because of the story involving his cloak which he shared with a poor man on a cold day (ch. 2, for the use of the relics see chs. 19 and 46).

⁷ In general, little evidence exists on the presence of relics in Iceland dated to the twelfth century or referring to the twelfth century (Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, pp. 61–5).

⁸ *DI* I, 49.

⁹ *DI* I, 69.

¹⁰ *ÞB*, chs. 93–8.

¹¹ *ÞB*, chs. 137–8.

¹² *ÞB*, ch. 139. Margaret Cormack suggests that "Þorlákr's oil" (or "ointment". Both the words *smýrsl* and *viðsmjör* are used in this context, Lat. *oleum* must refer to the same type of remedy) must have been oil "produced from his relics at the cathedral

that both Jón's and Þorlákr's relics were used only in curative miracles. In Jón's case, the amount of objects considered relics and used in curing all types of mental and physical diseases is much bigger. The saga mentions that Bishop Brandr Sæmundarson preserved some water in which Jón's bones had been washed during the translation.¹³ This water, mentioned as both "bone water" (*beinavatn*) and "Jón's water" (*Jóns vatn*) is used in numerous miracles,¹⁴ along with such objects as: a piece of cloth in which the bones were dried,¹⁵ a belt that had been laid on Jón's coffin,¹⁶ soil from his grave¹⁷ and some unspecified relics.¹⁸ As mentioned earlier, the note on Guðmundr's "habit" of collecting relics during the period of his priesthood follows immediately the description of particular innovations introduced by him after the spiritual change caused by Þorgeirr Brandsson's death. However, it is not stated anywhere in the sources where and how he would purchase or receive them, which is rather remarkable. Every time an individual of social importance bought, received or offered relics, it was noted in sagas or church inventories.¹⁹ On the other hand, in principle every church was supposed to have at least a piece of a relic, which was a prerequisite for its consecration. Icelandic charters and inventories frequently (most often) provide information of the presence of relics, but do not specify what it was, and those mentioned as purchases or gifts in the sagas are usually top rank objects: the Holy Cross, Christ's blood, remains of St. Martin of Tours, etc. It is thus plausible, that many relics had a symbolic value and the details concerning their ori-

rather than oil he himself had blessed" since all the miracles which mention it occur after 1198 (Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 62). However, other possibilities should not be excluded. Bishops used consecrated oil in various rituals and sacraments such as confirmation, and if any oil or chrism (consecrated mixture of oil and balm) which had previously been consecrated by Þorlákr was left after his death, it might have been distributed among the faithful as a relic.

¹³ JS, ch. 21.

¹⁴ JS, ch. 21; JS, ch. 22; JS, ch. 36. That story involves "some relics" brought by Bishop Guðmundr Arason, and the consecrated water mentioned in the following passage might as well be the water previously consecrated by him.

¹⁵ JS, ch. 37 and JS, ch. 39.

¹⁶ JS, ch. 51.

¹⁷ JS, ch. 41.

¹⁸ JS, ch. 23; JS, ch. 36; JS, ch. 46. Again, "some relics" owned by Bishop Guðmundr Arason are noted in the context, most probably bones, although it is not specified. The consecrated water mentioned in the following passage might well be water consecrated by Guðmundr.

¹⁹ E.g. the note on a piece of the crown of thorns sent by the King of France to the King of Norway in 1274 in *Árna saga*, ch. 13.

gin and identity were not significant. That was not meaningless since so many of those circulating in other parts of Western Christendom were forgeries, and Iceland was most probably no exception.

The identity of the relics that were stored in churches, and that could be used by Guðmundr for various purposes is one problem. Another issue is Guðmundr's almost private use of portable relics. The suggestion that he used to carry such objects with him must have been a novelty or at least an unusual thing to his contemporaries, just like the consecration of wells and springs on a massive scale, another feature mentioned in reference to that period.²⁰ However, it must be underlined that these were not new "habits" as such. Since the see of Hólar allegedly owned some of St. Martin's bones, Jón Ögmundarson had the possibility of using them, and Þorlákr was quite well known for his consecration of water, which might also have been used as a secondary relic.

To begin with a general overview, about twenty of the miracles which Guðmundr worked during his priesthood are healing miracles.²¹ Quite a few of them were performed with the use of not specifically defined "relics":

- a man at Skálholt, suffering from a kind of psoriasis or leprosy, was healed with *oleum* (*viðsmjör*, according to *GA* and *GB*) and prayer (*GB*, *GD*). The use of the oil is meaningful here as the miracle took place at Skálholt immediately after Þorlákr's *translatio*,²²
- Kolbeinn Tumason's ram was healed of the turning disease with Guðmundr's prayers and the image of John the Baptist put between the horns (*GA*). According to *GB* it was an image of "the Bishop Jón", possibly Jón of Hólar,²³

²⁰ The description of a journey from Svínafell to Ufsír is concluded by the author in the following way: "during the course of this long journey, to my own knowledge, many remarkable things took place when he held special services and blessed many wells" (*GP*, ch. 16 and *GA*, ch. 55).

²¹ The number is not exact as the counting is problematic here because of different versions of certain cases in particular texts.

²² *GA*, ch. 64; *GB*, ch. 43; *GD*, ch. 10.

²³ *GA*, ch. 87; *GB*, ch. 59. The cult of John the Baptist was quite developed in Iceland at the time; the saint was especially well represented in the northern part of the country (Cormack, pp. 109–11). John the Baptist, the saint who was beheaded, was regarded as patron saint of all those who suffered from headaches, mental problems, etc.

- Kolbeinn Arnórsson's (1176–1246) cow was healed by Guðmundr's walking around her seven times with certain unidentified relics ("med helga doma sina").²⁴

It is worth mentioning that healing was not only done *by* the saint. One miracle story mentions a curative miracle done *for* Guðmundr when he suffered from a severe headache and the parishioners prayed for him.²⁵ GA also mentions on this occasion Guðmundr's mother suffering from the same illness in the past and her son healing her with prayers. The passage is quite unique, and at the same time confirms the confidence in the power of prayer regardless of its source. It presents a saint as another human being, prone to diseases in the same way as other individuals from the community.

4.1.2. *The holy water and other means*

A substantial number of healing miracles took place thanks to the use of consecrated water. GA and GB contain an interesting remark that follows directly the description of Þorlákr's *translatio*:

Par uurðo margar merkilegar iartegni af heilagleic Thorl(aks) byskups með Guðe. Þar let Páll byskup G(udmund) prest uigea ser ker mikit fullt af uatne til heilso botar mönnum. þui at þer iarteinir urðo at uaz uigslum hans um alt land. bède fe ok mönnum sem nauðsyn krafðe til.²⁶

The authorial comment connects the miraculous abilities of the two saints, though it is most certainly Guðmundr's skills that are in focus here. The narratives mention two plagues: one at Skúmsstaðir where people, cattle and horses died,²⁷ and one at Hrafnagill that affected only animals.²⁸ The source material mentions a few healings of cattle and horses, and, individually, Kolbeinn Tumason's favourite ram or Kolbeinn Arnórsson's cow. Many specific diseases have been explic-

²⁴ GA, according to GB he walked around the animal three times (GA, ch. 65; GB, ch. 44). The owner must have been Kolbeinn Arnórsson *kaldaljó*s, Staðar-Kolbeinn (Genealogy 34), who also managed the estate of Hólar.

²⁵ GA, ch. 48; GD, ch. 14.

²⁶ "Many miracles occurred thanks to Bishop Þorlákr's holiness with God's grace. Then Bishop Páll asked Guðmundr to consecrate a big pot full of water so that it could be used to cure people because water consecrated by him worked miracles all over the country. It helped both people and animals whenever they needed it" (GA, ch. 63; GB, ch. 42).

²⁷ GP, ch. 20; GA, ch. 89; GB, ch. 60; GD, ch. 18.

²⁸ GA, ch. 29; GB, ch. 66; GD, ch. 18.

itly diagnosed: (madness,²⁹ bronchitis,³⁰ a boil,³¹ a withered hand,³² a turning disease,³³ etc.), so have the methods used to solve the problem and the means. In many cases the process of obtaining water from a well previously consecrated by Guðmundr is included in the story, but sometimes only the use of it is mentioned. It is, therefore, often difficult to establish in how many cases Guðmundr used to carry some with him and when he consecrated the water brought to him when it was needed. The sagas contain passages indicating that having some water consecrated by the saint became a habit.³⁴ However, one story mentions a curative miracle in which the beneficiary used water from Guðmundr's bath (the blind man named Ófeigr).³⁵

It is interesting to see how those miracles are distributed in the saga material and how details vary: only two are found in *GP*, while *GD* is exceptionally rich in them. An incident at Hof in which Guðmundr healed a sick man is listed in *GP*, *GA*, *GB*, and *GD*, but water was applied as a means only according to *GD*.³⁶ Otherwise, depending on the case, water was used in different ways: in case of infirmities or other physical disabilities it was poured on the patient or the sick limbs were dipped in it. In the majority of other cases (bronchitis, madness, plague) it was sprinkled on the sick or, in the case of a plague, on the fields and meadows that surrounded the inhabited area. Rather obviously, where a disease was not concentrated in one spot and clearly exposed, a more "holistic" but also practical approach was taken by Guðmundr. Again, the biggest variety is observed in *GD*.

Despite its significance water was not the only means used in all the curative miracles. To heal bronchitis, Guðmundr also made the sign of the cross above the man's throat (*GD* only);³⁷ to help a man named

²⁹ *GA*, ch. 35; *GB*, ch. 31; *GD*, ch.9.

³⁰ *GA*, ch. 46; *GD*, ch. 10.

³¹ *GP*, ch. 19; *GA*, ch. 85; *GB*, ch. 58; *GD*, ch. 16.

³² *GP*, ch. 19; *GA*, ch. 82; *GB*, ch. 55; *GD*, ch. 16.

³³ The case of Kolbeinn Tumason's ram.

³⁴ *GB*, ch. 32 mentions that people used to invite Guðmundr in order to obtain some holy water from him.

³⁵ *GA*, ch. 56; *GB*, ch. 39; *GD*, ch. 13. Guðmundr was present when the miracle occurred but did not take active part in it. The motif is known from many saints' lives, also in Northern Europe, for instance Saint Óláfr's *vita*, *Passio et Miracula Beati Olavi: From a Twelfth-Century Manuscript in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Oxford* ed. by F. Metcalfe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1881), 74–5.

³⁶ *GP*, ch. 19; *GA*, ch. 84; *GB*, ch. 58; *GD*, ch. 16.

³⁷ However, before Guðmundr gave the sick man some water to drink, he had dipped some relics in it. Thus, the relics and the water were also, indirectly, used in order to cure him.

Jón from Hvítastaðir who had lost all strength, relics and prayer;³⁸ to heal the crippled boy in Saurbær, prayer (prayer and relics in *GD*);³⁹ the sick man at Hof, “relics” (according to *GP* and *GA* the saint used them instead of water, according to *GB* he used prayers only), against the plague at Skúmsstaðir—relics (*GP*, *GA*, *GB*, *GD*), and prayer (*GD*); Hrafnagil, also church bell ringing (having previously made four signs of the cross on it). As far as the use of prayers is concerned, it might seem natural and implicit that Guðmundr prayed in each case, yet in a few it is stressed, possibly because a specific kind of prayer is used. It is, however, seldom mentioned, and the identity of relics used in the cases listed above is unknown.

The conscious use of particular means was, however, not always the case. A number of healing miracles took place almost without Guðmundr’s awareness:

- a man (Þórðr Árnason, in Keldudalur—*GP*, *GA*, *GB*) suffering from pain in his withered hand was healed by stretching it in a beam of light shining from the ceiling on Guðmundr’s bed (the priest was asleep),
- a servant woman (in Haukadalur, at Árni *rauðskegg*’s place—*GP*, *GA*, *GB*) had her crippled hand healed when Guðmundr, accidentally, hit it with his foot during a massage (the context suggests he did it unawares—see above),⁴⁰
- the deacon who had assisted Guðmundr in praying for the sick man at Hof got rid of a boil on his head when the priest, during a service, accidentally pressed it with his elbow.

Following the order of miracle stories in *GP* it could be explained by his limited experience in that matter as they are among the first miracles performed by him (following the *translatios* of Þorlákr’s and Jón’s remains). The other variants, as mentioned above, have listed many other wonderful events before those. Thus, according to *GA*, *GB* and *GD*, the stories are merely a manifestation of divine power which Guðmundr exercised even when he was not aware of it.

³⁸ *GA*, ch. 69; *GB*, ch. 47; *GD*, ch. 16.

³⁹ *GA*, ch. 77; *GB*, ch. 51; *GD*, ch. 16.

⁴⁰ *GP*, ch. 19; *GA*, ch. 82; *GB*, ch. 57; *GD*, ch. 16.

4.1.3. *Dealing with the natural and supernatural*

Miracle stories involve many farm animals as beneficiaries of cures, and wild animals are also provided by the saint as food for people in need, but there are examples where animals are not exactly the familiar creatures known from nature. *GA* mentions two incidents where dog-like apparitions were tamed by the power of Guðmundr and other saints. The first incident reportedly took place after the funeral of the victims of a journey in a snowstorm: Guðmundr blessed two fighting dogs (or dog-like apparitions that could not be separated in any way despite the efforts), and told them to separate and quiet down “in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”.⁴¹ That incident might simply be another sign of Guðmundr’s ability to handle animals, but the dogs could also symbolize the souls of two people who have just been buried. It does not seem to be the popular motif of the devil disguised as a dog, found *e.g.* in *Martinus saga*.⁴² Such an apparition is certainly mentioned in *GA* where two frightened clerics, attacked by a hostile dog, “called on holy men”, and the animal disappeared.⁴³

There are a lot of examples of Guðmundr’s dealing with nature and the elements—wind, fire and water—and the means used in those stories are very different. A good breeze for Þorgils Gunnsteinsson’s servant and sons was provided by Guðmundr’s prayers.⁴⁴ A great fire at Hólar that could not be stopped was extinguished with water previously consecrated by Guðmundr. Clearly, water was not only the element the saint used in order to perform such miracles. As a natural part of the Icelandic environment water was also the most frequently “tamed” element in the miracle stories. For example:

- an overflowing river at Lómagnúpur parted at the very presence of Guðmundr,⁴⁵
- a river at Svínafell flooding the area, went back to its previous course, thanks to Guðmundr’s long prayers with “relics” (*GP*, *GA*, *GB*), plus the image of St. Nicholas (*GA*, *GB*) and the sprinkling of consecrated water (*GD*),⁴⁶

⁴¹ *GA*, ch. 44.

⁴² Ch. 40.

⁴³ They “héttu á heilaga menn”.

⁴⁴ *GP*, ch. 18; *GA*, ch. 80; *GB*, ch. 53; *GD*, ch. 16.

⁴⁵ *GP*, ch. 20; *GA*, ch. 89; *GB*, ch. 61; *GD*, ch. 18.

⁴⁶ *GP*, ch. 22; *GA*, ch. 92; *GB*, ch. 65; *GD*, ch. 18. Arngrímr has compared Guðmundr to Frigidianus, bishop of Lucca, who rerouted the river Anser. The source of the story is Gregory’s *Dialogues* III, ‘Liber Tertius Dialogorum Gregorii’, ch. 9. St. Nicholas

- on the way to Norway a dangerous storm was calmed by the vows taken by the entire crew according to Guðmundr's advice,⁴⁷
- a great wave able to crush the ship was tamed by Guðmundr's blessings and the presence of "relics" (*GA*, *GB* and *GD*), as well as the sign of the cross (*GD* only).⁴⁸

As in the case of the majority of healing miracles, the use of water in other incidents is favoured by *GD*. Of all the narratives *GP* seems to keep to a rather "modest" level.

Many miracles are presented in a purely ecclesiastical context. Being the priest, Guðmundr put the importance of the service first. Several signs and miracles took place during services, and they were, as mentioned above, quite spectacular. Old twigs (*kvistir/pálmkvistir*) from the previous year, left by the altar, became fresh again when Guðmundr, washing the chalice, accidentally dripped some water on them.⁴⁹ In a church at Vellir, the locked tabernacle (to which a key was missing) where the hosts were kept, opened without any help from outside during the low chant.⁵⁰ While the former may be described as "accidental", the latter is well predicted. The authors stress the fact that people suggested breaking the lock, but Guðmundr told them not to do that as he obviously counted on the power of his prayer. A similar situation took place on the eve of Matthew's feast when the church opened for Guðmundr who returned home late in the evening and wished to pray.⁵¹

The list of the holy priest's miracles would be incomplete without two cases that demonstrate his power to deal with evil spirits. The story of Kolbeinn Tumason's wife might also be classified as a healing miracle,

was the patron saint of sailors and all those who were endangered by water. It is a reference to a legend according to which Nicholas as a little boy was left asleep on the shore by his companions, other pupils who were jealous of his achievements at school. When he woke up, the tide had advanced and the saint was surrounded by water but it didn't cover him and the boy was able to wait safely for rescue. The story must have been well known to the Icelandic clergy.

⁴⁷ *GP*, ch. 29; *GA*, ch. 114; *GB*, ch. 79; *GD*, ch. 22.

⁴⁸ *GA*, ch. 114; *GB*, ch. 79; *GD*, ch. 22.

⁴⁹ *GA*, ch. 40; *GB*, ch. 34; *GD*, ch. 7.

⁵⁰ *GA*, ch. 40 and *GB*, ch. 33. *GD*, ch. 7 mentions *offertorium*.

⁵¹ *GA*, ch. 39 and *GD*, ch. 8. *GB*, ch. 32 mentions only one walk around the church. According to *GA* the miracle was immediate. In his variant, Arngrímr states that clerics who assisted him wanted to wake people up and demand the key, but the priest refused to do that. Guðmundr did not want to trouble anyone and walked around the church praying for one hour.

although its spiritual dimension seems to be sufficient to consider it a type of exorcism. *GB* and *GD* contain a story about Kolbeinn Tumason's and his wife's journey to Vinverjadalur.⁵² Kolbeinn left Gyðríðr alone by the tents, and left with other men. When they returned, the woman was gone without a trace. As searching proved ineffective, Kolbeinn sent two men to ask Guðmundr to come. Although the official message said that the chieftain was ill and needed help, the saint made it clear that he was aware of the true reason of his visit.⁵³ Upon the arrival Guðmundr asked everyone to leave the tent and stayed there, praying, for three hours. When Kolbeinn was finally called back to the tent he saw his wife's body stretched on a cloth, in a very bad state; it was announced that she had been "tossed around by the trolls/giants" ("af tröllum válkæða").⁵⁴ The chieftain begged Guðmundr for help, but the priest stated that it was outside his abilities. The chieftain continued pleading with the holy man and eventually was asked to leave again. Two hours later the following happened:

sér hann þá guðligan krapt svá mikinn skína fyrir bæn sira Guðmundar, at líkaminn var aptr leiddr í mannliga mynd ok endrbættir í öllum greinum því fráteknu, at svo var hún mædd ok máttfarin, sem líf at eins bragaði fyrir brjóstinu⁵⁵

Here is how *GB* refers to the event:

Hann sér húsfrú sína liggja með fögrum lit ok náttúrligu yfirbragði, sem fyrr hafði hon. Gengr Kolbeinn þá til með fagnaði ok finnr, at líf er með henni, en svá var hon máttlítill, at hon fékk ekki talat.⁵⁶

⁵² *GB*, ch. 50; *GD*, ch. 17. In *GB* the place name is not mentioned, only the phrase "á einn völl" describes the site.

⁵³ "Þat trúi ek satt vera, at Kolbeinn sé krankr, en hvort sjúkara er, hugr hans eða hörund, látið þit kyrrt vera, en þat kann vera, at Kolbeini þykki ek skyldugr vera at fara" (*GB*, ch. 50; *GD*, ch. 17).

⁵⁴ In *GD* she was lying "á klæðunum", in *GB* she is lying "í grasinu". *GB*: "hon var bæði blá ok þrútin ok allóhugkvæmliga snöruð ok snúin ok ólíkt kristnum mönnum ok fullkomit dauð", *GD*: "líkam ljótliga spilltan, alla lund snaraðan ok drepstóttan".

⁵⁵ "[...] he sees great God's power shining for the sake of Priest Guðmundr's prayers, the body [of Gyðríðr] was put back in the human shape and restored completely after it had been taken away, which made her so tired and weak that the life only flickered in her breast" (*GD*, ch. 17).

⁵⁶ "He sees his wife lying there, looking healthy and well like she used to [before the incident]. Kolbeinn goes to embrace her and sees that she is back to life, although just recently her weakness made her unable to speak" (*GB*, ch. 50).

This mysterious cure is indicated rather than described in detail as other healings, and its function is very symbolic. Guðmundr expressed his wish that Kolbeinn, in gratitude, would serve God and his Church with loyalty. Kolbeinn assured the priest that his wish would be fulfilled, but the holy man expressed his doubts about that, as if predicting the struggle to come. Another story which concerns dealing with evil spirits is the story of a man from Skálavík. In autumn 1200 Guðmundr prayed at Hof in Vatnsdalur over a gravely sick man. After a few hours it seemed to the deacon who assisted him that the priest fell asleep and leaned against him. However, to the deacon's surprise, the body of Priest Guðmundr seemed to have no weight. Some time later the following news reached Hof: that same night a man from Skálavík named Snorri was trying to escape a creature which had been troubling him. Running away from it, Snorri "prayed that Priest Guðmundr should help him if he really had so much influence with God as he claimed".⁵⁷ Snorri's wish was granted; he saw a male figure surrounded by light, dressed in ecclesiastical vestments, and carrying a sprinkling vessel. As soon as the evil creature was sprinkled with holy water, it disappeared.

It is rather uncertain what kind of being is referred to in this context. While in *GP*, *GA* and *GB* the creature chasing the farmer in West Fjords is specifically *flagð* ("ogress", "giantess") and *tröllkona* ("demonic woman", eventually "witch"⁵⁸), in *GD* the author makes it clear that the man was troubled by "einn fjandi í flagðkonu mynd", a devil disguised as a giantess.⁵⁹ *GD* dramatizes the context: the man was going to attend a service, and therefore the devil wished to stop him. The presentation of Guðmundr as a saint dealing with the devil himself seems to have appeared the most suitable to Arngrímr; other authors refer more frequently to demonic creatures known from folklore.

The attention devoted to the years of Guðmundr's priesthood and the amount of miracle stories attributed to him in that period of his life is astonishing. Little is known about the achievements of the other two Icelandic holy prelates Jón and Þorlákr that could be compared to Guðmundr's. An interesting miraculous event that supposedly

⁵⁷ *GP*, ch. 15; *GA*, ch. 85; *GB*, ch. 58.

⁵⁸ Both in *GP* and *GA* the description is identical: farmer Snorri "var leikinn af flagði einu, ok sótti hann trollkona ein", *GB* mentions a *trollkona* as well.

⁵⁹ *GD*, ch. 16.

took place during Jón's priesthood involved an Iclander named Gísl who had killed King Magnús Ólafsson's retainer to avenge his father.⁶⁰ According to *Gísls Þáttir Illugasonar*, Jón's speech to defend the killer was so impressive and eloquent that Gísl was set free. The younger version contains a more elaborate variant of the event: Jón, seeing that the king would not release Gísl, put his coat around him. The man was hanged and remained on the gallows from Monday to Wednesday. When the rope was cut, Jón approached the "corpse" and called the dead man by his name, to which he responded, and everyone could see that Gísl was alive.

Generally speaking, miracles *in vita* are relatively rare in the records of continental cults after the twelfth century, but there are exceptions, e.g. in the case of St. Bernard.⁶¹ The cult of a living saint, it must be underlined again, has not always been perceived as a positive phenomenon, for such reasons as vanity or the necessity of "trial by time". A saint must have gone through the test of time and show through miracles his/her divine ability to intervene while dwelling in heaven. In the twelfth century the revival of learning and the interest in science led to an increase in the discussion of magic. The saints' ability to perform miracles posthumously was the proof of their being true actors of divine power as opposed to magicians and others accused of contact with devil who often worked false miracles.⁶² However, the possibility of demonic intervention in any of the miracles seems to be absent in the Icelandic hagiographic material. The hagiographers of Jón and Þorlákr were against describing the *in vita* miracles of their protagonists in order to avoid the issue of vanity. It is clearly stated that people should not be praised during their life: "Ne laudaveris hominem in vita sua"/ "Lauda post mortem, predica securum". The "ne laudaveris" motif has been included in the *vitae* of both saints.⁶³ The authors of sagas concerning Guðmundr chose another type of

⁶⁰ JS, ch. 5.

⁶¹ Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind*, p. 175–84.

⁶² The problem of "false" and "authentic" miracles has been discussed by e.g. Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind*, p. 168, Michael Goodich, 'Innocent III and the miracle as a weapon against disbelief', in *Lives and Miracles of the Saints. Studies in Medieval Latin Hagiography*. Variorum Collected Studies Series (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 456–70 or Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Middle Ages*, pp. 496–8.

⁶³ JS, ch. 9 and ÞA, ch. 8; ÞB, ch. 9. The motif has been inspired by *Ecclesiastes* (11:30) or, more directly, taken from a sermon on St. Eusebius attributed to Maximus of Turin. Nearly a whole passage from the sermon has been used in the Latin *vita* of St. Þorlákr (Gottskálk Jensson. 2004. 'The Lost Latin Literature of Medieval Iceland:

strategy and focused on the practical side of his *in vita* miracles, frequently underlining God's grace and demonstrating thereby that the saint is just a tool of it. Guðmundr's lack of awareness during miracle making would exclude the issue of vanity.

Another question is the approach towards miracle and merit in the stories of the Icelandic holy bishops. While Jón's and Þorlákr's hagiographers focus on their protagonist's merits in the passages referring to different stages of their lives and leave most of the miracle stories for later, the authors of *Guðmundar sögur* demonstrate his merits *through* miracles.⁶⁴ The virtues of holy men were supposed to be the basic criteria of their holiness: ascetic lifestyle, piety, love of others, wisdom and patience.⁶⁵ That canon was kept in Europe throughout the Middle Ages, but not always followed rigorously, as *Guðmundar sögur* (especially *GD*) demonstrate. It is quite clear in all the narratives concerning the Icelandic saints that the men's virtues led to their miracle making. However, while in Þorlákr's and Jón's case the chronological boundary is rather sharp, the narratives concerning Guðmundr reveal a different pattern. It might partially be due to the composition of the material as Margaret Hunt has suggested, one of the main differences being Arngrímr Brandsson's thematic grouping of miracle stories and commenting on them instead of following linear chronology.⁶⁶ However, since Guðmundr's *in vita* miracles are listed (and their number is quite impressive) in all other variants, it clearly means that the narratives concerning him propose a new model of saintliness.

The presence and importance of consecrated water in those miracle stories seems to confirm that. This quite individual feature is, as the narratives show, based on the power of Guðmundr's blessings and his ability to work miracles immediately and regardless of the suppliant's location, which proved to be especially important during the years of his episcopacy.

The Fragments of the *Vita Sancti Thorlaci* and Other Evidence'. *Symbolae Osloenses* 79: 150–70, pp. 165–6).

⁶⁴ Hunt, *A Study of Authorial Perspective*, p. 229.

⁶⁵ Hunt, *A Study of Authorial Perspective*, p. 230.

⁶⁶ Hunt, *A Study of Authorial Perspective*, pp. 228–9.

4.2. In vita miracles in the years of Guðmundr's episcopacy (1203–37)

4.2.1. The significance of consecrated water

The authors of the narratives state,

Vígslur Guðmundar byskups váru merkiligar, þegar er hann var prestur, en þó jók mikit við, síðan hann var byskup.⁶⁷

The significance of holy water in the accounts of Guðmundr's episcopacy is indisputable. During a long and elaborate conversation with the Norwegian Archbishop Þórir víkverski (abp. 1206–1214), the importance of water and Guðmundr's consecrations was discussed.⁶⁸ It has been suggested that this dialogue was inspired by similar dialogues known from the lives of imported saints which had been translated into Old Icelandic.⁶⁹ During that meeting Guðmundr explained his views on the symbolic meaning of water, on its purifying and holy nature as interpreted according to the biblical tradition. The examples from Scriptures that have been included are the creation of the universe and two events from Christ's life: the first miracle during the wedding in Cana and the baptism in the river Jordan.⁷⁰ What follows is an analysis of the four elements and the nature of the human body, which is supposed to illustrate the extraordinary nature of water as the superior element above all other elements (for instance, by turning into tears of repentance for sin).⁷¹ Guðmundr's main argument for his consecration of springs, lakes and rivers is due to the general lack of

⁶⁷ "Bishop Guðmundr's consecrations were extraordinary when he was a priest, but increased a lot when he became Bishop" (*GJtb* ch. 11; *GB*, ch. 125).

⁶⁸ *GB*, ch. 100; *GD*, ch. 50.

⁶⁹ Hunt, *A Study of Authorial Perspective*, p. 99. The purpose of such a conversation was to test a saint's beliefs and practices. The individual questioned had to defend certain truths and ideas. However, it also bears resemblance to the dialogues preserved in the Icelandic version of *Elucidarius* (*Elucidarius in Old Norse Translation*, ed. by Evelyn Scherabon Firchow and Kaaren Grimstad (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar: 1989)), p. 68.

⁷⁰ The significance of Christ's baptism in Jordan and the holiness of water was discussed by both early medieval thinkers such as John Chrysostom (347–407) and the contemporary of Guðmundr's biographers, Thomas Aquinas (1225–74). A detailed dissertation about the properties of water and its role in the creation of the world is attributed to Tertullian (155–230. Ch. Daxelmüller, 'Wasser. Volkskunde', in *LM* VIII, 2062–64). The subject was very popular in Europe throughout the Middle Ages but it is uncertain which text inspired Guðmundr's lecture about water included in the sagas.

⁷¹ Present in *GB*, absent in *GD*.

certainty about how far the holiness of all water in the world that was sanctified by Christ's baptism in Jordan reached. The saint explained to his superior that although one may assume that since the river flowed into the sea and was later joined by other waters, it should be safe for him to bless the landmarks he came across because it was not him but God himself that performed the rite through him. God had created all the water and provided humankind with the sacrament of baptism. As it is the most immutable of all elements, the significance of Christ's baptism remained unchanged, but by consecrating water, Guðmundr merely reinforced its power with the aid of the Holy Spirit. The purifying function of water, the role of baptism and references to the wedding in Cana appear frequently in sermons included in the Icelandic Homily Book.⁷² The most striking example is, however, the homily on the Lord's Epiphany—it seems possible that the author of *GB* and the author/s of the homily referred to the same source.

The use of holy water in the earliest days of the Christian era is attested by documents of only a comparatively later date. However, it is permissible to suppose that in the Middle Ages water was commonly used for expiatory and purificatory purposes. In some places it was carefully preserved throughout the year and, by reason of its having been used in baptism, was considered free from all corruption. Pope Leo IV (pp. 847–55) ordered that each priest bless water every Sunday in his own church and sprinkle the people with it, and Hincmar of Reims (806–882) ordered that every Sunday, before the celebration of Mass, the priest should bless water in his church. The faithful, when entering the church, were to be sprinkled with this water, and those who wished to take some holy water home in order to sprinkle their houses,

⁷² The symbolism of water is discussed in the following homilies: ['Um messuna], 'Nativitas sancti Johannis baptiste', ['Trúarjátningin'], ['Brúðkaupið í Kana'], 'Epifania Domini', 'Purificatio S. Marie', ['Um písl Krists'], 'Apparitio Domini', 'Oratio Domini', 'Ascensio Domini' and 'Circumcisio Domini'. Since the *Icelandic Homily Book* is dated to (approximately) 1200, the motif of Christ's baptism in Jordan which consecrated all the waters must have been rather well known in Iceland at the time when the sources concerning Guðmundr were composed. It is difficult to ascertain whether Guðmundr himself popularized all the aspects mentioned in the sagas or whether the "lecture" is partially, if not entirely, the result of authorial creativity. It has not been possible so far to establish whether some specific imported text influenced the spread of this motif in medieval Iceland (Stefán Karlsson, 'Greftrun Auðar Djúpúðgu', pp. 483–6. See also Hallberg's discussion of the image of water as used in Old Norse texts (Hallberg, 'Imagery', pp. 413–7).

fields, vineyards and cattle with it, were allowed to do so.⁷³ Blessing various objects with consecrated water was, obviously, not reserved for the clergy and the laity practiced it frequently in the absence of a priest or a bishop. The custom was most probably well known and practiced also in Iceland. Owning some water previously consecrated by Guðmundr seems to have been a habit among the medieval Icelanders. The example of the woman from Lambadalur who went to fetch some because, as the only one in her area, she hadn't had any (and was ill spoken of) illustrates it rather well.⁷⁴

During the years 1203–37 water was used by Guðmundr with a greater frequency against demonic attacks: a seal-headed demon Selkolla,⁷⁵ hauntings in Norway (by the consecration of a spring),⁷⁶ and *flögð* at Eiði (the vestments as a means are mentioned as well).⁷⁷ The authors mention that the bishop “blessed” a mountain in order to free the place from the spirits that had haunted it. Another time he “blessed” a rope used for climbing cliffs, which later saved the life of the climber when all the other ropes broke. It is unclear from the context whether some holy water or, for instance, only the sign of the cross was used.⁷⁸ Selkolla's story is an interesting one, and an example of a vicious circle: left by her parents to herself as they decided to make love, she was kidnapped by evil spirits and turned into a demon.⁷⁹ Although not much attention is devoted in *Guðmundar*

⁷³ ‘Capitula synodalia’, cap. v, in *PL*, CXXV, col. 774. The rule of having water blessed for the aspersion at Mass on Sunday was generally followed, but the exact time set by Leo IV and Hincmar was not observed everywhere. There are two Sundays on which water is not and seems never to have been blessed: these are Easter Sunday and Pentecost. On the eve of these two feasts water for the baptismal fonts is blessed and consecrated and, before its mixture with the holy chrism, the faithful are allowed to take some of it to their homes, and keep it for use in time of need.

⁷⁴ The authors of *GP* and *GA* have placed that miracle among those which Guðmundr worked during his priesthood. *GJtb* lists two cases of a similar type, no encounter with Guðmundr is mentioned in the context. A woman from Lambadalur went to Mýrir in West Fjords in order to fetch some water from a well previously consecrated by Guðmundr, and brought it back home in a hat without losing a drop (ch. 11); apparently, someone did the same at Kálfanes in West Fjords (ch. 21). The woman from Lambadalur is also mentioned in *GB*, ch. 125. It is difficult to assume whether the stories should be dated to Guðmundr's episcopacy or considered posthumous, but the context would suggest the years 1203–37.

⁷⁵ *GJtb*, chs. 20–21; *GB*, chs. 146a–147; *GD*, chs. 39–43.

⁷⁶ *GD*, ch. 63.

⁷⁷ *GJtb*, ch. 14; *GB*, ch. 130; *GD*, ch. 54.

⁷⁸ *GJtb*, ch. 15; *GD*, ch. 54.

⁷⁹ *Flögð* (pl.: *flögð*) is usually translated as “ogre” or “giantess”. Selkolla was according to Einar Ólafur Sveinsson “most likely a ghost” (Einar Ólafur Sveinsson,

sögur to the sacrament of baptism, the vulnerability of babies before they received it and any negligence on the parents' part certainly occupied the minds of the authors.⁸⁰ Unlike other cases of demonic attack mentioned in *Guðmundar sögur*, Selkolla's case was especially complex. A lengthy ritual involving the use of holy water and seven crosses was performed by Guðmundr in order to free the inhabitants of Steingrímsfjörður from this seal-headed demon.

4.2.2. *The bishop as a food provider*

As far as typology of miracles is concerned, those of the greatest importance for the years of Guðmundr's episcopacy were miracles concerning food provision. This type of miracle, hardly present in the material describing Guðmundr's priesthood or the early years (with the exception of providing a whale for a visit to Jón Brandsson's house), seems to be predominant here. Material exchange between the saint and the faithful is rather intensive: during his episcopacy Guðmundr either helped the poor (who asked him for aid) to survive the hard times, or provided with food those who shared their surplus with him and his followers. Thus, material goods circulated according to evangelical

The Folk-Stories of Iceland. Viking Society for Northern Research 16, ed. by Anthony Faulkes, trans. by Benedikt Benedikz (London: University College London, 2003), pp. 157 and 185). The author refers to Selkolla as the ghost of an exposed infant, which is incorrect. The parents abandoned her for a short while on the way to church where they were going in order to baptise the girl. Thus, their intentions were initially good, but their lust made them neglect the unbaptised baby, which resulted in tragedy. It is clearly mentioned that while the baby girl's parents were having sexual intercourse, the devil entered her body ("óhreinn andi var hlaupinn í bók barnsins", both in *GJtb* and *GB*, in *GD* it is clear from the context). In all the sources Selkolla is referred to as "unclean spirit" (*óhreinn andi*) and "enemy" (*fjandi*). In *GD* she is also mentioned as *miðdegisdjöfull* and *óvinr*. Regardless of the source, it is not explicitly stated in the context that the baby girl died while the parents abandoned her for a while. It is clearly suggested that she was possessed: the body of the baby was never found and a grown up woman appeared in the area of Steingrímsfjörður whose head "sometimes seemed to look like a seal's head" ("stundum þótti selshöfuð á vera").

⁸⁰ In Iceland, like in other countries within medieval Western Christendom, it was mandatory to baptise children as soon as possible in order to save them from postnatal death in sin and, consequently, eternal punishment in hell. It is uncertain whether the idea of *limbus puerorum*, a place in which the souls of unbaptised children would be safe from this fate, was known and popular among the Icelandic clergy in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It was discussed at the Second Synod in Lyon in 1274 and numerous theologians, including Thomas Aquinas, debated that issue in their writings (Delimata, *Dziecko w Polsce Średniowiecznej*, pp. 76–7. The issue of baptism in medieval Iceland has been discussed e.g. in Else Mundal, 'Barneutbering', *Norskraft* 56 (1987), 1–64.

principles: the poor were taken care of and the generous ones who were willing to share their possessions with the bishop but also those in need who followed him were rewarded with twice as much (or more) as the amount they had offered. When Guðmundr visited a man called Þorsteinn Þórðarsson at Reykjahlið in Mývatn there was a bad season there, but he and his people were fed well. The bishop consecrated the river that flowed nearby and that resulted in miraculous salmon fishing.⁸¹ A similar story took place at Staðarbakki. A man named Ali decided to offer the bishop a cow, and another farmer, Þorgrímr, did not approve of that. Guðmundr assured Ali that the Virgin Mary would pay him for his generosity with “something that is not worse than the cow” (“sem eigi er verra en kyren”).⁸² The reward was an astonishing amount of salmon which gave Ali a great profit. It is difficult to establish whether those generous farmers offered their help of their own will or for fear of sharing their fate with Böðvarr Þórðarson from Borgarfjörður. Böðvarr had refused to give Guðmundr his best sheep, and on the following night the animals were killed by a fox.⁸³

The animals from the miracle stories are treated as valuable possessions. The bishop does not seem to have healed any animals during his episcopacy, which is quite a big contrast to the years of his priesthood when curative miracles were rather numerous. The animals from miracle stories concerning the years 1203–37 are both domestic animals such as cows⁸⁴ or sheep⁸⁵ which people were requested to (or willingly offered to) share with Guðmundr, but also whales⁸⁶ or fish, as mentioned above,⁸⁷ which the bishop provided. Water previously consecrated by Guðmundr was also used in the “provision of food” miracles in a very different way when compared to the miracles performed in the years 1185–1202. Thanks to his blessing a piece of turf turned into meat, and another time grass cooked in water blessed by Guðmundr helped a poor woman survive the famine.⁸⁸

⁸¹ *GJtb*, ch. 9 and *GB*, ch. 123; *GD*, ch. 68.

⁸² *GJtb*, ch. 10 and *GB*, ch. 124; *GD*, ch. 67.

⁸³ *GJtb*, ch.3; *GB*, ch.118; *GD*, ch. 65.

⁸⁴ *GJtb*, chs. 7, 9 and 10; *GB*, chs. 121, 123 and 124; *GD*, chs. 64, 65, 67 and 68.

⁸⁵ *GJtb*, ch. 3; *GB*, ch. 118; *GD*, ch. 65.

⁸⁶ *GD*, ch. 65. This story is the one involving Jón Brandsson, placed by the older authors in the passages devoted to Guðmundr's priesthood.

⁸⁷ *GJtb*, chs. 9 and 10; *GB*, chs. 123 and 124; *GD*, ch. 68.

⁸⁸ *GJtb*, ch. 12 and *GB*, ch. 128.

Both in the provision-of-food miracles and other miracles it is noticeable that the use of rituals gained in sophistication during the years of Guðmundr's episcopacy. Such incidents as exorcisms (especially that of Selkolla) and healings, but also the excommunication of people and animals, for example of the fox at Bær in Bogarfjörður which killed Böðvarr Þórðarson's sheep, demanded quite complex acts. An interesting example is the story that supposedly took place at Kirkjuból where Guðmundr visited a man named Óláfr Helgason. There, the bishop cured a crippled woman named Þorbjörg the following way: he promised to pray for her to God, the Virgin Mary and Archangel Michael in the night. The woman was placed in his bed for the whole night. In the morning the following happened:

[...] var hon borin til kirkju ok sett niðr hjá altari til hægri hliðar hjá biskupi, ok gekk hann þrysvar til hennar í messuni ok it síðasta sinn, er hann hafði þvegit sér. Síðan reið hann vatni á krypplinginn ok blessaði hana, ok varð hon þegar í stað heil ok gekk sem hon aldri hefði kreppt verit.⁸⁹

This is the only Icelandic curative miracle performed by Guðmundr in person during his episcopacy which has been recorded in the extant source material, although *GJtb* (in which it is preserved) mentions that many healings took place during his journeys around the country.⁹⁰ And, interestingly enough, the method resembles the one used by Ambrose in Florence to heal a possessed boy.⁹¹ Ambrose's "patient" was laid in the bishop's bed while Ambrose himself was in the church praying. When he came back he prayed, touched the boy, knelt by the bed and asked him three times to rise.

4.2.3. *New territories and new abilities*

During the years of his episcopacy Guðmundr's miraculous abilities reached beyond Iceland. Although his cult does not seem to have

⁸⁹ "[...] she was brought to the church and laid on the floor on the right side of the altar close to where the bishop stood. He approached her three times during the service and the last time he did it after having washed his hands [the liturgy of Eucharist]. Then he poured the water on the cripple and blessed her, which cured her immediately and she began to walk as if she had never been crippled before" (*GJtb*, ch. 21).

⁹⁰ "[...] ok urðu þá enn margir merkiligir hlutir í ferðum hans [...] ok margs kyns heilsugjöfum" (*GJtb*, ch. 8) Arngrímr also added two Norwegian cases of healing: the man bitten by a snake (ch. 49) and the blind child (ch. 51).

⁹¹ *Ambrosius saga byskups*, ch. 17.

spread to other countries, the fourteenth-century saga authors suggest that a few miracle stories took place in Norway. The authors note, “ok gerðust þá enn margir merkiligir hlutir um háttu Guðmundar byskups ok svá um sagnir hans”.⁹² However, only the miraculous division of a silver bowl among three beggars is to be found in other fourteenth-century versions beside *GD*.⁹³ The youngest *Guðmundar saga* includes a wider selection of events: healing a man from a snake bite,⁹⁴ keeping books dry in a storm,⁹⁵ healing a blind child,⁹⁶ the consecration of a spring to stop hauntings.⁹⁷ *GD* also mentions a fight with a sea serpent on the way from Niðaróss to Bergen.⁹⁸ Arngrímr added prophecies as well: while going with one of his priests through the Vang woods Guðmundr had a vision of an event that took place elsewhere at the same time: a farmer (*bóndi*) named Óláfr from Berudalur and a hundred and two people drowned in the sea that very moment.⁹⁹ They were not baptised and Guðmundr prayed for their souls which were in grave danger. He wanted other people to spread the news and to pray for them as well. After a while they found out that the event really took place as they were going through the woods (forests) in the storm.¹⁰⁰

The fourteenth-century sources, especially *GD*, change the image of Guðmundr as a miracle worker. Although he managed to free the man at Skálavík from a troll woman already during his priesthood, as a bishop he performed exorcisms and excommunication as well. The water consecrated by his blessing became the most efficient means to achieve the goal and in a few cases was used in a complex ritual. The Norwegian miracles recorded by Arngrímr add a Norwegian dimension to the bishop's saintly fame. An interesting difference between miracle stories from the years 1203–37 and those known from the years 1185–1203 is a reduced presence, not to mention the use of, means

⁹² *GA*, ch. 207. “[...] vm hans hattv ok spasogvr” (*GB*, ch. 109).

⁹³ *GB*, ch. 118. In *GD* this miracle is included in two variants and, as the author underlines, these are two different events. In the first story a silver goblet (*borðkerr*) is divided among four beggars (ch. 51), and in the second a silver bowl (*silfrbolla*) among three beggars (ch. 62).

⁹⁴ *GD*, ch. 49.

⁹⁵ *GD*, ch. 51.

⁹⁶ *GD*, ch. 51.

⁹⁷ *GD*, ch. 63.

⁹⁸ *GD*, ch. 62.

⁹⁹ “x tígir manna ok tveir týndust á þessari stund í sjó” (*GD*, ch. 63).

¹⁰⁰ *GD*, ch. 63.

other than holy water. Only the description of the bishop's dealing with *flögð* in Eiði mention them explicitly: "he [Guðmundr] went with his relics, water and a sprinkling vessel".¹⁰¹ A simple explanation could be provided here: since the context informs us that it was a time of argument between the bishop and certain chieftains, it could have been the relics he had removed from the church at Möðruvellir/Hörgardalur.¹⁰² It is stated in the text that before Guðmundr left Hólar he took the relics and books with him to save the holy objects from profanation. Another explanation might be the one that as a bishop Guðmundr's saintliness advanced as well as his clerical career. It became confirmed with the passage of time by his good deeds and prophetic skills, as well as the testimony of deceased saints. Also his prayers had enough power to work miracles. Another interesting fact that can be observed here is that in two of the "Norwegian" miracles (the healing of a man bitten by a snake and of a blind child) Guðmundr used his own saliva to cure the suppliants.¹⁰³ Those stories are exceptional and make the contrast between him and the other two Icelandic holy bishops even sharper.

Jón's and Þorlákr's hagiographers have not listed any miracles from the time of the prelates' priesthood. Despite the reluctance of presenting any miracles *in vita*, the authors have noted certain events that took place during their episcopacy. A priest named Eyólfur Gunnvaldsson asked Jón Ögmundarson for a piece of St. Martin's bone that had just arrived at Hólar.¹⁰⁴ The bishop hesitated, as although the request was put humbly, he could not bear the thought of parting the holy relics by force (and he only had one bone). He placed the bone on the altar and at the end of the service he observed that it was divided into two unequal parts. The smaller one was sent to Grenjaðarstaðir for the priest and the bigger one remained at Hólar. Its power worked miracles at the see through St. Jón. However, the thaumaturgic power of Jón's touch is also underlined in the narratives. As in other examples mentioned above, the miraculous abilities of a living bishop are

¹⁰¹ "Hann [Guðmundr] gekk út með helga dóma sína ok með vatn sitt ok stökkul" (*GJtb*, ch. 14; *GB*, ch. 130; *GD*, ch. 54).

¹⁰² *ÍsLS*, ch. 21, *GA*, ch. 130, see also *GB*, ch. 89 and *GD*, ch. 32.

¹⁰³ "[...] spýtir hann sálifu í vinstra lófa ok riðr með henni hring allt umbergis eitrblástrinn" (*GD*, ch. 49). Vauchez mentions a similar "method" used by Hugh of Lincoln in his cures (Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Middle Ages*, p. 446).

¹⁰⁴ *JS*, ch. 10.

directly connected with the power of a deceased one in this context.¹⁰⁵ A few miracles worked by Jón are reported later in the saga, but none of them involves the use of relics, only prayers, blessings and the bishop's touch, in a healing,¹⁰⁶ an "exorcism"¹⁰⁷ and the improvement of the weather.¹⁰⁸

As far as Þorlákr is concerned, two miracles according to the B variant, and one according to A are reported to have taken place during his episcopacy.¹⁰⁹ It is interesting to mention that the water consecrated by the bishop is also a means in one of them: Þorlákr sprinkled some water over Viðey in order to get rid of mice which ate the crops.¹¹⁰ However, only one case of that kind has been recorded, which means that Þorlákr's use of consecrated water cannot be compared to Guðmundr's. It may be assumed that the consecration and use of holy water was definitely the latter's domain, although, as mentioned above, Þorlákr's biographers praised his consecrations, but decided not to mention the effects as praising a man during his life would be inappropriate.

4.3. *A critical view on the wonders*

The miracle is an appeal to knowledge. Its character is known from human knowledge of natural forces and their limits. Adelard of Bath was convinced that recourse to miracle as an explanation was a last resort and could only be used when all other causes have been tested and excluded. The complexity of any hagiographic material is based to a great extent on its ability to put pragmatism and improbability

¹⁰⁵ "Margir menn kómu þeir á fund ins heilaga Jóns byskups, er höfðu ýmisligar sútir eða sjúkleika, ok fengu skjóta bót sinna meina eptir hans yfirsöngva ok heilaga blezan" (JS, ch. 10).

¹⁰⁶ JS, ch. 11.

¹⁰⁷ JS, ch. 12.

¹⁰⁸ JS, ch. 13. This story mentions the improvement of weather directly after the description of Jón laying his cloak on the ground (a symbolic act of founding the monastery at Þingeyrar, see BpS, p. 228, ft. 1).

¹⁰⁹ In ÞA Þorlákr's merits and miracles performed during his life are all listed before the remark on his consecration. Thus, it might mean that they already occurred during his abbacy, or that it was only authorial comment on what happened later. In the B variant the story about a fire extinguished at the command of Þorlákr's blessing is placed during the time of his abbacy, but that about saving Viðey from mice after Þorlákr's consecration for bishop (ÞA, ch. 8; ÞB, ch. 9).

¹¹⁰ ÞA, ch. 8; ÞB, ch. 29.

side by side. Medieval Icelanders depicted in Guðmundr's *vita* and *miracula* witnessed highly impossible incidents while trying to obtain their favourite remedy, water consecrated by the saint. The motif of holy water carried safely in a linen hat is a good example here. In *GJtb* the incident is described in an interesting way, as if the author/compiler wished to rationalize the miracle:

Ok vígir byskup brunnin, ok er þetta vatn svá heilagt, at þat var borit í línúfu yfir Steingrímsfjörð ok þótti sem svell at sjá, meðan í húfunni var, en þá var þurr, er ór var tekit vatnit.¹¹¹

Younger variants include also the story of a man who took some water in a bucket which, during his journey in the mountains, fell down on the ground, but the amount of water inside stayed the same.¹¹² Clearly, a text that glorified an individual's sanctity had to contain descriptions of some improbable events, although a large number of such cases is not found in the Icelandic narratives about the three holy bishops. However, it would be wrong to maintain that the audience read a hagiography "to find what happened and not to reflect on how what happened is presented".¹¹³ Miracle stories frequently contain explanations or cautious authorial remarks, which are there not only to express the hagiographer's humble attitude towards the matters, but to provide the potential audience with a certain explanation. Whether it was an attempt to explain how God's grace works or how the laws of nature cause things to happen, the authors combined the probable and the (seemingly) improbable elements so that the readers or listeners would believe the stories.

The miracles or the means used to achieve them did not always evoke pious feelings; relics especially awoke lots of controversy. The sagas mention a few cases of scepticism which did not always result in a complete change of attitude by those who doubted the divine power, as one might expect from hagiographic material. A man from Vellir named Þorsteinn Þraslaugarson accused Guðmundr in 1196 of having acquired for himself the offerings that had been given to the church (and, in fact, to the saints who were its real owners) by people in times

¹¹¹ The bishop consecrated the well and the water was so holy that it was carried across Steingrímsfjörður in a linen hat. It looked like a lump of ice while it was still in the hat and it was dry. But then it was taken out of the hat and became water again (*GJtb*, ch. 21).

¹¹² *GA*, ch. 81; *GB*, ch. 54; *GD*, ch. 16.

¹¹³ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 44.

of extremity.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, the fact that “it was Guðmundr’s frequent practice on festivals to allow men to kiss the holy relics” irritated Þorsteinn. The man doubted the identity of those relics and suggested that the bones might as well be horse’s bones.¹¹⁵

A similar event took place at Svínafell in the late summer/early autumn of 1201 when Guðmundr visited Chieftain Sigurðr Ormsson (d. 1235), only this time the supremacy of St. Þorlákr over St. Jón was discussed. Sigurðr asked the priest for some relics.¹¹⁶ He was presented with some of Jón Ögmundarson’s bones and soon afterwards a priest named Steinn expressed his disapproval of considering Jón a man as holy as Þorlákr. According to Steinn, the bones did not look grand enough to be the bones of a holy man.¹¹⁷ Guðmundr Arason tried polemics with him first, but then asked everyone gathered at the place to kneel down and pray for a “proof” of Jón’s holiness and soon a sweet scent of roses emanated from the bones. As soon as Steinn realized that he was the only one who could not smell anything, he fell down to his knees and began to call on Jón begging for his forgiveness. Eventually also Steinn received the ability to smell the wonderful scent. He was also presented with a piece of St. Jón’s relics.

Those two stories present doubts that naturally existed in a society exposed to such very particular aspects as the cult of relics, rather than doubts in Guðmundr’s miraculous abilities. They are examples of unfavourable opinion expressed by different types of people and it should not be surprising that the story involving the priest is more spectacular than that where a layman expresses his skepticism. First of all, the point was to show how wrong it was for a member of the clergy to doubt the holiness of the relics. The story of Bishop Brandr’s erroneous judgement concerning water blessed by Guðmundr is another good example; only when the fire at Hólar really was extinguished by it did he change his mind.¹¹⁸ Second, the doubt concerned a native holy

¹¹⁴ *GP*, ch. 16; *GA*, ch. 53; *GB*, ch. 38.

¹¹⁵ “Þat var vanði Guðmundar prests oft hátíðir at láta menn kyssa á helga dóma. En Þorsteinn kveðst eigi vita, hvárt þat váru heilagra manna bein eða hrossabein” (*GP*, ch. 16; *GA*, ch. 53; *GB*, ch. 38).

¹¹⁶ *GP*, ch. 22; *GA*, ch. 91; *GB*, ch. 64. The event is also mentioned in *JS*, ch. 61, but Sigurðr’s participation is omitted.

¹¹⁷ “Þá ræddi um prestur sá, er Steinn hét, at sér þætti eigi vel litt beinit ok óheilagligt” (*GP*, ch. 22; *GA*, ch. 91; *GB*, ch. 64).

¹¹⁸ It exists only in the fourteenth century variants, *GA*, ch. 47 and *GD*, ch. 11, but could easily be matched with the comment on Brandr’s ill will towards Guðmundr

bishop and affected another individual who was going to be both the follower of Jón at the see of Hólar and a saint.

Guðmundr's own saintly reputation was also tested at almost the same time, but in quite different circumstances. The man from Skálavík named Snorri, who in autumn 1200 was running away from the *trollkona* that chased him on the way to church, "prayed that Priest Guðmundr should help him if he really had so much influence with God as he claimed".¹¹⁹ Help was granted him immediately, and the fact that he challenged the saint did not prove to be an obstacle.

4.4. *Arngrímr Brandsson and his interpretation of miracles*

Arngrímr chose to add a happy ending to the story of the sick man over whom Guðmundr was praying at Hof the night Snorri from Skálavík was freed from the apparition. Apparently, the sick man rose from his bed, which is a detail missing in other sources.¹²⁰ Arngrímr is also the only one of Guðmundr's hagiographers who has not mentioned the saint's "defeat" in another case involving holy water. Already Lambkár Porgilsson has written about a well at Reykjahólar consecrated by Guðmundr Arason during the time of his priesthood in which someone urinated in 1199, and by doing this the person desecrated the place: the water lost its healing properties.¹²¹ While the authors of *GA* and *GB* follow in Lambkár's footsteps and repeat the statement, Arngrímr states that the well flourished as it had before that event, and the water healed people.¹²² As it has already been observed, Arngrímr's goal seems to have been the demonstration of Guðmundr's

being demonstrated by claiming all the books which he had received from Ingimundr Þorgeirsson (see 3.2. above).

¹¹⁹ *GP*, ch. 15; *GA*, ch. 85; *GB*, ch. 58.

¹²⁰ "[...] þá er sjúkr reis ór rekkju, en sótt af fjanda frjálsaðist" (*GD*, ch. 16).

¹²¹ *GP*, ch. 18: "[...] ok batnaði þá eigi síðr við við þat vatn en áðr". See also *GA*, ch. 70; *GB*, ch. 47. However, I disagree with Úlfar Bragason's statement that this incident shows the scepticism of the author/compiler of *Sturlunga saga* towards the power of Guðmundr's consecrations (Úlfar Bragason, 'Sturlunga's text of *Prestssaga*', p. 487). *GP* lists many miraculous events and is fairly convincing in supporting Guðmundr's sanctity, and it is rather the attitude of *Elzta saga*'s author that might be questioned here as that variant was the first one to include the story. However, I would suggest that the whole context aims at blaming the lack of respect which people had towards Guðmundr.

¹²² "[...] framarr og fyrrblómgaðist sjá brunnr mönnum ok fénadi til heilsubótar" (*GD*, ch. 16).

infallibility. The author was also preoccupied with the significance of the holy water in the saint's life.

Arngrím's approach towards miracles in general distinguishes him from the other authors. He frequently uses the phrase *contra naturam* (against nature) in reference to particular events. This concept had already been used in Peter Abelard's commentaries on the Creation narrative in Genesis. Abelard hesitated between classifying them as events "against nature" or "above nature" explaining that miracles were not subject to the laws of nature. The definition of a miracle as a direct intervention of God who freely rules all his creation, including nature, was what mattered. The term "contrary to nature" would not mean unnatural in the sense of causing confusion, but a demonstration of divine power to change the course of nature.

That definition of a miracle in the Middle Ages became more precise with time, as the perception and understanding of nature began to change. The primary text in the twelfth century for discussing creation was the first chapters of Genesis, but the Platonists of the twelfth century were also influenced by the account of creation given in the *Timeaus* with the commentary of Chalcidius. The interest of Platonists in the causes of things increased with the appearance of Aristotle's work on physics and his Arab commentators. The mechanics of the secondary causes of the events was put in focus, and that limited even further all the events that could be called miraculous. *Timaeus* was known in medieval Iceland, as were other works of Neo-Platonists, such as John of Salisbury's *Polycraticus* and the aforementioned *Elucidarius* by Honorius Augustodunensis. The influence of those writings is reflected both in saga narratives and in skaldic poetry, and texts concerning Guðmundr Arason are no exception here.¹²³

Arngrím's preoccupation with understanding the laws of universe is also demonstrated in his detailed description of Iceland's nature and astrology.¹²⁴ Astrology was perceived as a science, moreover a science not colliding with Christian religion at all; the zodiac was just a manifestation of the cosmic order constituted by God. Being aware of this, Arngrím included it also in the description of Iceland in his

¹²³ Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy and The Icelandic Physiologus*. Facsimile edition with an introduction by Halldór Hermansson, *Islandica. An Annual Relating to Iceland and the Fiske Icelandic Collection in Cornell University Library*, vol. XXVII. Ithaca, New York 1938.

¹²⁴ GD, ch. 2.

variant of *Guðmundar saga*.¹²⁵ *GD* was prepared for a foreign audience with the intention of starting Guðmundr's canonization process. He seems to have been familiar with the type of evidence that would be demanded by the papal authorities, and adjusted his saga to the standards represented by the majority of miracle collections or *vitae* examined by modern research.¹²⁶ The fact that the *contra naturam* (and not *supra naturam*) option is represented in *GD* is rather significant. In the late Middle Ages this category became a decisive one in defining sainthood by emphasizing "the extraordinary, the singular and the superhuman" in the canonization process, though the categories *supra naturam*, *contra naturam* and *praeter naturam* were never clearly and unanimously defined.¹²⁷

Thus, *GD* presents a more sophisticated model of hagiography than those used by the authors of other narratives concerning Guðmundr or the sagas about Jón or Þorlákr. Nevertheless, all the Icelandic *vitae* seem to focus more on the charisma of the bishops and the final effect of the miracles rather than on the nature or structure of those events. The authors do not seem to be preoccupied with the problem of "authentic" and "false" (in the sense of "diabolic") miracles either. Even when their attitude reveals cautiousness in giving an event a specific label or avoiding any personal comments and relying on others' opinion, the result is the same. The holiness of the native bishops seems to be undisputable and their acts fully justified.

¹²⁵ *GD*, ch. 2

¹²⁶ See e.g. Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Middle Ages*, pp. 481–98.

¹²⁷ Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Middle Ages*, p. 520.

CHAPTER FIVE

GUÐMUNDR'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH POWERFUL LAYMEN

The characteristic feature of Guðmundr Arason's *vitae* on which modern research centres is the period of his episcopacy and the arguments with chieftains. However, it should be borne in mind that the saint, as the narratives claim, also worked a lot of miracles for many noble laymen and was proclaimed a holy man by them. A closer look at the events proves that Guðmundr's relationships with the powerful laymen were not as uniformly negative as is often assumed. Many of them provided him with support at the beginning of his clerical career and remained in the same position when others entered into a conflict with the saint during the years of his episcopacy. Also quite a few of those who opposed Guðmundr for various reasons had initially had a positive relationship with him. Altogether the analysis of those alliances puts them in a rather complex perspective showing how much depended on family ties, social position, and the political situation in a particular period of time.

5.1. Kolbeinn Tumason was a *skáld* and a chieftain (*goðorðsmaðr*) at Víðimýri (in the vicinity of Hólar).¹ Although married to Guðmundr's cousin, he does not seem to have been involved in the saint's life at first. Guðmundr's first brief visit to Víðimýri took place in spring 1199, and in winter 1199/1200 he stayed with the chieftain who showed him "much respect and affection".² Moreover, Kolbeinn declared Guðmundr "a truly saintly man" and maintained that he had a proof of this, meaning, among others, the miracles performed by the saint.³ A year later, as the narratives underline, Guðmundr was "at home at Víðimýri" where he enjoyed great esteem and favour.⁴

¹ Genealogy 34.

² *GP*, ch. 18; *GA*, ch. 70; *GB*, ch. 59.

³ "[...] kallaði hann at sönnu sannhelgan mann", *GP*, ch. 18; *GA*, ch. 70; *GB*, ch. 48.

⁴ *GP*, ch. 19; *GA*, ch. 79; *GB*, ch. 52.

The situation began to change immediately after the death of Bishop Brandr Sæmundarson. On 14 September 1201, while Guðmundr was staying at Krossavík in Vopnafjörður, the messengers from Kolbeinn Tumason arrived there and Einarr *forkr* delivered the news to him: “Kolbeinn and all the men of the district have elected you as their bishop”.⁵ Little about the process of episcopal election in Iceland at the time can be said with certainty. The sources usually mention election of bishops before they were sent for consecration, but details concerning, for instance, its agreement with the requirements of canon law are unknown.⁶ According to narratives and documentary evidence, the process consisted of a public discussion about the candidates and the reigning bishop seems to have had the last word. However, it is difficult to state whether his opinion was decisive or whether it was a mere confirmation of a decision taken by a gathering where chieftains probably had the most influence. The latter seems to have been relevant in the northern diocese where all the bishops (apart from Jón Ögmundarson) were chosen by the northerners, and where all the bishops down to Guðmundr Arason were of chiefly rank.⁷ They were members of different families, which suggests that none of them was predominant in the area of Skagafjörður. Moreover, another pattern can be observed: all those chiefly families who were represented by the different bishops were influential but would not use their control of the diocese as a primary tool of dominance. The bishops turned out to be rather submissive and the same was expected from Guðmundr Arason.

About a month later (mid-October 1201) Kolbeinn met Guðmundr and told him about a meeting held at Vellir on the Feast of St. Egidius (1 September). The chieftain made it clear that he would have accepted the election of Guðmundr and that of Magnús Gizurarson (1216–1237) who had much stronger support as well as more experience. Magnús was one of the sons of Chieftain and Lawspeaker Gizurr Hálsson, and could be called a second chieftain to his older brother Hallr, who was also a priest, and later a lawspeaker.⁸ The fact that Guðmundr and not

⁵ “Þú ert kosinn til biskups af Kolbeini ok öllum heraðsmönnum” (GP, ch. 23). GA, ch. 96 (adds ”ok abotum”), GB, ch. 68 (fragmentary—the sentence is missing after *af*).

⁶ Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland* 2000, p. 157.

⁷ For a detailed discussion see Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland* 2000, pp. 157–60.

⁸ Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland* 2000, p. 156. See Genealogy 7.

Magnús had been elected was interpreted by Kolbeinn as “the will of God and men”.⁹ The statement was not necessarily based on the chieftain’s piety. It was based on his wish to control Skagafjörður as well as of the entire Northern quarter, especially the see of Hólar. The author has made it rather explicit that the candidate himself discovered it about that time.¹⁰ He did so not only thanks to the information he had heard, but also thanks to a dream about the altar in the Vellir church falling into his lap.¹¹

Kolbeinn Tumason was the most powerful chieftain in the northern quarter when Guðmundr began his episcopacy. The case of a priest named Ásbjörn was the first serious conflict between him and the bishop. It was one of many incidents in which both sides used the exclusion of the guilty individuals from the community as a means of punishment: Kolbeinn’s decision about outlawry for Ásbjörn was issued against Guðmundr’s sentence of excommunication for Kolbeinn. The bishop forbade all religious services to Kolbeinn, to all those who had taken part in the judgment and those who had on their oath borne witness or testimony.¹² Another case involving Sigurðr Ormsson followed, but Sigurðr managed to reconcile with the bishop.¹³ Kolbeinn refused to accept that solution and was held by Guðmundr in excommunication for having associated with Sigurðr. Since neither Kolbeinn nor his people respected it, the chieftain was excommunicated for his association with the excommunicants and for holding back half the fine.¹⁴ Reconciliation was attempted in the spring of 1207 but in the following year another case took place; an acolyte fathered a child and the woman’s brother asked Guðmundr for material support. The bishop agreed to pay it, but Kolbeinn objected and had the cleric

⁹ “[...] at guðs kóri ok manna”, *GP*, ch. 25; *GA*, ch. 100.

¹⁰ “En er Guðmundr prestur sá, hvé horfði af Kolbeini, at hann vildi ekki annat, ok hugði sér þetta mundu vera dælst” (*GP*, ch. 26; *GA*, ch. 101).

¹¹ *GP*, ch. 23.

¹² *ÍslS*, ch. 20; *GA*, ch. 124; *GB*, ch. 86; *GD*, ch. 28.

¹³ According to *GD*, ch. 29 Guðmundr not only had a lawsuit against Sigurðr Ormsson and Hallr Kleppjárnsson before they finally reconciled, but he actually excommunicated them (the word *bannfærir* is used). *GA*, ch. 126 and *GB*, ch. 87 repeat after *ÍslS* that the bishop “hafði [...] í stórmælum tvá höfðingja”. Since, according to *ÍslS*, Guðmundr excommunicated Kolbeinn before Christmas 1206 for the earlier association “with the excommunicants” (“er hann hafði samneytt bannsettu mönnum”), that is: Sigurðr and Hallr, it must be assumed that the previously mentioned lawsuit involved the excommunication of the chieftains (*ÍslS*, ch. 20).

¹⁴ *ÍslS*, ch. 20; *GA*, chs 127; *GB*, ch 87; *GD*, ch. 29.

prosecuted for outlawry. Guðmundr put Kolbeinn and his supporters under interdict, but having learned that they summoned a court of execution against the cleric and confiscated the money, he excommunicated everyone who was in on the judgment.¹⁵

Guðmundr decided to manifest his independence from Kolbeinn and allowed all the men that had been outlawed by the chieftain to enter the church. In effect, Kolbeinn and all the other men who were excommunicated by the bishop continued attending the services as well. Some priests began even to associate with the excommunicants. Furthermore, after Guðmundr had put the ban on them for being disobedient, they continued to celebrate services.¹⁶ The bishop decided to take away the shrine, relics and books from the church at Möðruvellir in Hörgardalur as he did not want the objects to be in a place where excommunicants were in control.¹⁷ Sigurðr and the people who assisted him, seeing this, accused Guðmundr of theft, and, together with Kolbeinn, decided to attack him. The bishop and his people were surrounded at Hólar on the occasion of celebrating the Latter Feast of the Virgin Mary (8 September). Kolbeinn's stubbornness and his reluctance to accept the bishop's conditions were punished severely: though known as a devotee of the Virgin Mary, the chieftain and his people were the only ones gathered there who did not hear the bells ringing.¹⁸ This event illustrates in a symbolic way Guðmundr's superiority over Kolbeinn: since both of them were devoted to the Virgin Mary, the chieftain's fault was punished by her.

Arngrím Brandsson's description of the event is different and the chieftain's role surprisingly positive. Apparently, Kolbeinn was shocked not to hear the bells and attributed it to Guðmundr's anger

¹⁵ The bishop gave to Kolbeinn all the outlaws and removed the excommunication ban from him (*Íslendinga saga*, ch. 20; *GA*, ch. 129; *GB*, ch. 88; *GD*, ch. 31).

¹⁶ Ch. 21. It is not specified where "north of Hólar" it was and the names of the priests are not given. In *GA*, ch. 129 the excommunication of the priests and their disobedience afterwards are not mentioned, nor are they revealed in *GD*, ch. 31. *GD* omits the fact that Guðmundr showed a lack of respect for Kolbeinn's sentence of outlawry as well. *GB*, ch. 89 follows *ÍslS*.

¹⁷ "Síðan ferr biskup með flokkinn heim á Möðruvöllu ok hafði í brott skrín ok helga dóma ok bækr nökkurar, því at honum þótti ómakliga komnir helgir dómar þeir, er bansettir menn varðveittu" (*ÍslS*, ch. 21, *GA*, ch. 130, see also *GB*, ch. 89 and *GD*, ch. 32).

¹⁸ "Máriumessukveld var hringt á staðnum öllum klukkum till aftansöngs, ok er svá sagt, at þeir Kolbeinn heyrðu ekki klukknahtjóð" (*ÍslS*, ch. 21). In *GA*, ch. 131 it was only Kolbeinn who did not hear the sound, *GB*, ch. 89 and *GD*, ch. 33 mention the whole following again.

over the conflict, which he assumed was so great that the bishop would not allow the bells to be rung on such a holy day.¹⁹ The remark might be perceived as ironic and addressing Guðmundr's vengeful attitude. However, the text further mentions a member of Kolbeinn's following who suggested that the bells had probably been rung, only the men were unable to hear them. Having heard that, the chieftain prayed to the Virgin Mary for forgiveness. The prayer took the form of a poem and its authorship has, in fact, been attributed to Kolbeinn.²⁰ It is difficult to ascertain whether in Arngrímr's view the chieftain's behaviour was influenced by the bishop's prayers or, indeed, Kolbeinn's piety.

In the fight at Víðines (9 September 1208) Kolbeinn Tumason received a fatal blow. He was hit by a stone, and it was unknown who actually had thrown it.²¹ Shortly before he died, the chieftain asked for a priest and received permission from Guðmundr to have his wish fulfilled. He swore the oath of reconciliation (to be reconciled with the church) and received the last rites.²² *GD* provides a dramatic ending to the story; when Guðmundr heard about the situation, he prayed "My Lord and Saint Mary, help your poet".²³ Shortly afterwards, Kolbeinn regained his consciousness and the ability to speak (which he allegedly had lost when hit by the stone), and asked for a meeting with the bishop. His wish was granted and the chieftain reportedly asked for forgiveness for all his trespasses as well as confessed his sins before he died. Guðmundr took care of his body, brought it to Hólar and arranged a memorable funeral.

Unlike in the passages about Guðmundr's priesthood, *GD* reports the events in detail after the older sources. However, the role of particular characters in those events is often depicted in a very different way than it is in the older variants. The allusions to Kolbeinn as the "novus Henricus" and the comparison of Guðmundr to Thomas Becket are very noticeable in this context, but not entirely relevant.

¹⁹ "Reiðr er Guðmundr, mágur vorr, er hann lætr klukkur þegja svo dýra hátíð".

²⁰ According to Olav Bø, Kolbeinn Tumason is supposed to have been the first Icelander to compose Marian poems, but none of them have survived to our times ('Mariadigtning. Norge, Island', in *KLNM* XI, 379–380). However, Stefán Karlsson argues that Kolbeinn's actual authorship of the poem "Heyrðu, himna smiðr" is unlikely (Stefán Karlsson, 'Saltari Kolbeins Tumasonar', *Þorlákstíðir sungnar Ásdísi Egilsdóttur fimmtugri 26. október 1996* (Reykjavík, pp. 57–9).

²¹ According to Arngrímr it was God's revenge provoked by the assault on Guðmundr (*GD*, ch. 35).

²² *ÍsS*, ch. 21; *GA*, ch. 132; *GB*, ch. 89.

²³ "Drottinn minn ok sancta María! hjálpstu skáldi þínu" (*GD*, ch. 34).

Arngrímr has clearly used the political background in order to portray Guðmundr as a fighting saint. The suggestion of martyrdom, however, is little convincing in his relationship with Kolbeinn. The latter is depicted in *GD* as a pious individual who did not use any excessive violence against the bishop. The scene of Kolbeinn's death proves Arngrímr's familiarity with the contemporary *vitae*, perhaps also the records from the canonization processes. Among the requests made to saints in the fourteenth century, were some which concerned neither the restoration of health nor protection against the various calamities which could threaten material life: appeals to resuscitate stillborn children long enough for them to be baptised, or requests from blind people for their sight to be restored for a few moments so that they could see the consecrated host.²⁴ In this *in vita* miracle Guðmundr was involved in Kolbeinn's regaining of conscience before the full reconciliation with the Church was possible. He asked the Virgin Mary for her intervention and thanks to his prayers the chieftain had a "proper", Christian death.

A stanza composed by Kolbeinn and found in *GB/GC/GD* (Holm. Perg. no.5 fol) says: "God has made Guðmundr like/Thomas in his authority", which is hardly a negative comment, but rather an expression of respect for the bishop.²⁵ In another *GD* manuscript, AM 396 4to, it is different: "Guðmundr, the heir of Ari, wants to become like Thomas in his authority", which might suggest Guðmundr's excessive ambition, but is still quite a neutral statement.²⁶ The hymn *Heyr himna smiðr*, attributed to the chieftain, which follows that verse in *GB* and *GD*, strengthens the image of Kolbeinn as that of a pious man. Even if Kolbeinn Tumason was not the author of *Heyr, himna smiðr*, his poetic skills were well known by his contemporaries as well as in later centuries. He had, for instance, composed verse in praise of St. John the Apostle.²⁷ Being Guðmundr's relative put him in a special position. An attempt at presenting the chieftain as a pious individual, or at least an individual who experienced a spiritual awakening at the moment of death, seems to be almost obvious in such a situ-

²⁴ Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 475.

²⁵ "Guð hefir Guðmundr görvan glíkan Thómási at ríki".

²⁶ "Ara vill Guðmundr gørvask glíkr Thómási at ríki...erfingi". The latter is most probably the original reading (Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, pp. 100–110).

²⁷ Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, pp. 89 and 175–6.

ation. Comparing him to King Henry seems, therefore, not entirely suitable.

5.2. Sigurðr Ormsson was a chieftain at Svínafell.²⁸ Jón Jóhannesson and Magnús Stefansson have referred to Sigurðr in their publications as “Guðmundr’s friend”.²⁹ Of all the chieftains who had a close relationship with Guðmundr and certain impact on the image of his sainthood, Kolbeinn seems to have been the only “closed chapter”. Sigurðr, the other largely significant figure, is one of those who gradually were withdrawn from the story. His first meeting with Guðmundr took place after the general assembly in 1196, when Sigurðr invited the saint home for a short visit. Then Guðmundr stayed with him again in 1201, and a significant dialogue between the two men took place one day, one that might be perceived as a premonition about Guðmundr’s future. Sigurðr, willing to take revenge on Chieftain Sæmundr Jónsson (of Oddaverjar, 1154–1222),³⁰ found it difficult to accept the advice about finding consolation in the way the conflict ended. The chieftain suggested that instead of asking God to give Sigurðr support, Guðmundr should pray for enough power for himself in the northern district. Having achieved that, Guðmundr would be able to grant Sigurðr an estate in that area so that he would gain enough support from its inhabitants and have his revenge. Sigurðr assured the priest, “I have a strong presentiment about you, that in the future you will wield much more power and influence than you do now”.³¹ This premonition was, according to the chieftain, enough to demand from Guðmundr a promise that he would provide Sigurðr with an estate. Otherwise, he threatened to plot revenge at once.

Guðmundr’s best solution in this difficult situation was a diplomatic answer that the final decision should be left to God. As the authors comment that decision was already taken that day although neither

²⁸ Genealogy 46. Svínafell in Örafi was located on the territory of the Skálholt bishopric.

²⁹ Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga*, p. 238, Magnús Stefánsson, ‘Kirkjuvald eflist’, p. 122.

³⁰ He was a chieftain (*goðorðsmaðr*) and a deacon. The dispute has been described in *GA*, chs. 71 and 74; *GB*, ch. 62.

³¹ “Mér sýnist svá mikit yfir þér [...] at þú verðir enn meira ráðandi en nú ertu” (*GP*, ch. 21; *GA*, ch. 90; *GB*, ch. 62).

Sigurðr nor Guðmundr were aware of it, for that day Bishop Brandr died and “this was the day on which Guðmund was granted the rule and authority of a bishop”.³² This dialogue was followed by three important events that took place at Svínafell during Guðmundr’s visit: in addition to the aforementioned incident with Jón’s relics, a flood was stopped, and a dying woman promised Guðmundr to take his greetings for the Virgin Mary and other saints to heaven. The first two events were, one might say, provoked by Sigurðr. The dispute about relics would not have taken place if Sigurðr had not asked Guðmundr to give him some; the desire to own relics might certainly express the chieftain’s wish for more prestige for himself, but the official reason was his piety.³³ The chieftain was also the one who asked the saint to “go and sing prayers” over the flooding river.³⁴ Those events created a good opportunity for the demonstration of Guðmundr’s saintliness, as well as the support of deceased saints for him. Jón, Guðmundr’s holy predecessor at the see of Hólar, is the centre of attention in the relic incident. To stop the flood Guðmundr used the image (possibly a sculpture) of another bishop, St. Nicholas (*líkneski Nikolai byskups*). The fact that Guðmundr decided to “send” his greetings to heaven and addressed Ambrose as his friend is rather meaningful in this particular context. The act might be read as something more than sheer piety. Expecting conflicts and dilemmas, the future bishop of Hólar asked the deceased holy man for assistance and support, and Ambrose, a holy bishop who had experienced much enmity from laymen in power, was the right patron to turn to. Sigurðr Ormsson, however, was at the time far from imagining the future conflicts, which the sources comment upon: “Sigurðr found all those incidents extraordinary and thanked God and all the saints”.³⁵

³² “Þenna dag bar undir hann [Guðmundr] ráð biskupsdóms” (*GP*, ch. 21; *GA*, ch. 91; *GB*, ch. 63).

³³ “Sigurðr bað Guðmund prest gefa sér helga dóma” (*GP*, ch. 22; *GA*, ch. 91; *GB*, ch. 64).

³⁴ “Þá bað Sigurðr Guðmund prest fara til ok syngja yfir ánni” (*GP*, ch. 22; *GA*, ch. 92; *GB*, ch. 65). In *GB* Sigurðr Ormsson is only mentioned in reference to the flood. The author comments in this context that the chieftain later opposed Guðmundr, despite all the help he had received from him.

³⁵ “Um þessa alla hluti þótti Sigurði mikils vert, ok þökkuði guði ok öllum helgum” (*GA*, ch. 92; *GB*, ch. 65).

5.3. Arnórr Tumason. Shortly after the visit at Svínafell, the news about Brandr Sæmundarson's death spread around the country and Guðmundr was elected the new bishop of Hólar. Having accepted the election, Guðmundr sent a message to Svínafell, in which he stated that the signs sent by God allowed the fulfilment of his promise. This way Sigurðr Ormsson and his wife Þuríðr were invited to take responsibility for the bishop-elect's establishment and finances at Hólar.³⁶ After Kolbeinn's death, Sigurðr stayed in opposition to the bishop and led the attack on Hólar together with Chieftain Arnórr Tumason (of Ásbirningar, c. 1184–1221) in spring 1209, which ended with a violent fight, also inside the church.³⁷ Guðmundr, finding it impossible to accept Arnórr's severe conditions of "reconciliation", one of which involved a demand for removing the ban of excommunication from the chieftains, took minimal care of their souls: "Only at the entreaty of those men of his who were at the point of death did the bishop give them such hope of eternal life as to sing a *Miserere* for the chieftains; but he told them they were no more truly absolved than before".³⁸

After the incident Arnórr and Sigurðr took control of Hólar and Guðmundr was forced to begin his "outlawry", but the context suggests, in fact, that it was Arnórr who initiated most of the actions against the bishop. It is interesting to observe that the following spring Guðmundr managed to send letters to the see and have the church locked. The authors (except for Arngrímr) have noted, "Arnórr and Sigurðr could not endure the church without divine service".³⁹ One might wonder whether it is another authorial effort to depict the chieftains as "noble evildoers" temporarily blind but pious, or were they simply willing to have the cathedral function regularly for the potential profit? In the incident at Möðruvellir that took place in late summer 1208, Sigurðr called Guðmundr a thief when he decided to remove

³⁶ GP, ch. 28; GA, ch. 112; GB, ch. 72; GD, ch. 22.

³⁷ ÍsLS is rich in similar episodes where church buildings serve as battle sites. Considering the Icelandic landscape, they were, strategically, simply good targets. In the hagiographic context of Guðmundr's life and struggle, however, the sacrilegious character of those scenes is particularly striking.

³⁸ "Þat varð við bæn þeira, er dauðamenn váru þá, at biskup vann þat til lífs þeim, at hann söng yfir þeim Miserere, og segir þeim þó, at þá váru þeir eigi lausari en áðr" (ÍsLS, ch. 24; GA, ch. 141; GB, ch. 95; GD, ch. 36).

³⁹ "Þeir Arnórr ok Sigurðr þola eigi, at kirkjan sé tíðalaus" (ÍsLS, ch. 25; GA, ch. 144). Arngrímr does mention that "litlu síðar leiðist ræðismönnum þessi þögn kirkjunnar" (ch. 37), but no names are revealed.

relics from the church. The chieftain not only disapproved of the bishop's act as sacrilegious, but it cannot be excluded that he believed in the power of relics as in 1201 he allegedly witnessed the miraculous power of Jón Ögmundarson's relics at his estate at Svínafell.⁴⁰ Thus, his attitude must not be interpreted as entirely antireligious; rather anticlerical, just like Kolbeinn Tumason's.

Sigurðr is briefly mentioned only a few more times after those events. Archbishop Þórir put his name second on the list of the chieftains who he had considered most guilty in the case against Bishop Guðmundr (and the Church in general).⁴¹ Arnórr Tumason decided to go to Norway and talk to the archbishop about the conflict, while Sigurðr stayed in the north of Iceland, managing the land. In the dialogue with Sighvatr Sturluson Arnórr's scepticism towards calling Sighvatr's sudden regaining of health a miracle stresses also his negative attitude towards the saint. Sighvatr suggested the word *jartegn*, which in this context could be translated as "miracle", and Arnórr objected, stating that he would rather use *atburðr*, that is: "event".⁴² I find it hard to agree here with Lars Lönnroth's suggestion that Arnórr's image in this context is that of a "cautious and relatively humble Christian" who refuses to call the event a miracle because that might be unreasonable.⁴³ Even Sighvatr's question might either be read as the expression of his genuine belief in miracles or as an ironic remark since they had been dealing with a bishop who had the reputation of a saint, and Sighvatr himself was the bishop's opponent (see below). This dialogue has provoked quite a few scholarly discussions because of the use of the words *jartegn* and *atburðr* in Icelandic medieval literature, especially hagiographical narratives.

⁴⁰ See 4.3. above.

⁴¹ GA, ch. 147 does not mention any of the names from the archbishop's list, only the fact that the letter made Arnórr retreat for a while (GB, ch. 96).

⁴² "Arnórr mælti: 'Í sumar hefir mér verit kvellingasamt. En er mér kómu orð Reykdæla, at þeir þyrfti liðs við, hóf af mér allar vámur, svá at ek kenni mér hvergi illt.' "Þat mun þér þykkja jartegn," segir Sighvatr. Arnórr segir: "Slikt kalla ek atburð, en eigi jartegn." (Ísls, ch. 37; GA, ch. 172; GB, ch. 106; GD, ch. 53). Sighvatr's question might either be read as the expression of his genuine belief in miracles or as an ironic remark since they had been dealing with a bishop who had the reputation of a saint.

⁴³ Lars Lönnroth, 'Saga and Jartegn. The appeal of mystery in saga texts', in *Die Aktualität der Saga. Festschrift für Hans Schottmann*, ed. by Stig Toftgaard Andersen (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), 111–24 (p. 116).

Margaret Hunt has suggested that authors of *biskupa sögur* were reluctant to use terminology that openly refers to miracles.⁴⁴ The reason was supposedly the awareness that the deeds of men who had a saintly reputation should not be praised before their death, and before their saintliness is authorized (in other words: the aforementioned *ne laudaveris* motif). However, that argument can only be applied to a few narratives (*Jóns saga A*, *Þorláks saga A* and *Hungrvaka*), composed earlier than *Guðmundar sögur* and representing a different ideal of a holy bishop. Moreover, in the same narratives the word most commonly used of a miraculous event is, in fact, *atburður*, which would completely change the meaning of Arnórr Tumason's argument. In a number of other religious texts, however, such as *Stjórn* or *Heilagra Manna Sögur* the same word is applied only once when miracles are discussed.⁴⁵ An overview of the entire medieval Icelandic literature shows that a large number of terms were applied in particular narratives to describe miracles or miraculous events. The fact that a clearly defined classification of miraculous events or the nature of things was not available made writing about them a challenging task. Certainly, in many cases avoiding the most obvious designation might suggest authorial cautiousness. However, it is most often the need to use a variety of terms for literary/aesthetic reasons, for instance to avoid repetitions (when many events of such kind are listed) or to underline the complex nature of the events described. In hagiographical writing, as Heffernan writes, "language will often have to depict contexts which defy all our understanding of probability and the natural world", and the use of terms *jartegn* and *atburður* are good examples here.⁴⁶

Guðmundar sögur do present a large variety of events themselves and terms used to designate them. It is known from the context of Arnórr Tumason's conversation with Sighvatr that the event discussed could be perceived by many as a miracle. Moreover, nothing indicates that Arnórr was a religious person, so the interpretation of this short exchange of opinions should not be dubious in any way. In *GD* Arnórr's sceptical attitude is stressed by the use of the word *mótburður*, a "coincidence". In all the other variants *atburður* should, therefore, be read as event and *jartegn* as a miracle, which was perhaps the most

⁴⁴ Hunt, *A Study of Authorial perspective*, p. 211.

⁴⁵ Hunt, *A Study of Authorial Perspective*, pp. 211–2.

⁴⁶ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 11.

obvious and classical association; after all, the oldest extant Icelandic manuscripts translate the word *miraculum* into *jartegn*.⁴⁷

According to all the variants of Guðmundr's *vita* Arnórr is definitely depicted as the worst enemy from the beginning of his participation in the plot till the end. Though it is nowhere mentioned that Sigurðr ever reached reconciliation with Guðmundr, he does not seem to have been involved in any more struggles with the bishop. Both Sigurðr and Kolbeinn were bound to Guðmundr by the link of earlier friendship and kin, but also by the miraculous events they participated in, which neutralized their fierceness.

5.4. Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson, Guðmundr's uncle, tried to appeal to the saint's piety when Guðmundr was elected the new bishop of Hólar, and told him about two prophetic dreams he had had about his nephew's episcopal career. In the first one, Þorvarðr saw an extraordinarily large building and tried to enter it, but as he stood in the doorway his shoulders got stuck and he could not go any further. In the second dream, the chieftain arrived in Niðaróss and was cordially received by St. Óláfr who prophesized that Þorvarðr should be honoured throughout Scandinavia.⁴⁸

The interpretation of those dreams reveals an ironic side to the conflict between uncle and nephew. The fact that Þorvarðr was not able to enter the grand place not only suggests Guðmundr's unusual greatness but also Þorvarðr's inability to participate in the saint's glory. The second dream may symbolize the nobility of his kin gained thanks to Guðmundr. However, it is tempting to argue that the dream also reflects the chieftain's confidence in himself rather than the saint's fame; while it wouldn't be difficult to find references to St. Óláfr's support for Guðmundr in the narratives, it is hard to prove that his reputation (as a saint or a bishop) spread across the whole of Scandinavia.

⁴⁷ Sverrir Tómasson, 'Inngangur' in *Heilagra karla sögur* (eds.) Sverrir Tómasson, Bragi Halldórsson and Einar Sigurbjörnsson (Reykjavík: Bókmenntafræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands 2007), p. xlii.

⁴⁸ *GP*, ch. 25 and *GA*, ch. 99. In *GD* the dream is placed in ch. 4, at the very beginning of the *vita*, among other signs and dreams of Guðmundr's greatness. A parallel has been drawn by Arngrímur between the second story and the dreams/signs Máild, Thomas Becket's mother, had about her son. While the older variants leave the question open for interpretation, *GD* seems to value Þorvarðr's dreams as evidence for Guðmundr's saintliness and exceptional vocation.

Þorvarðr told Guðmundr about those dreams in order to convince his nephew to accept the result of the election.⁴⁹ The little contact Guðmundr and Þorvarðr had from the beginning of the saint's life could not have suddenly caused a positive change in their relationship. This conversation provoked the saint's confrontation with the chieftain and revealed his awareness of Þorvarðr's greed for control. It shows that, despite his kind approach towards people, willingness to compromise and forgive, as well as total submission to God's will, Guðmundr was hardly a quiet and fearful person.

It is quite interesting that Þorvarðr never appears in the narratives again after his nephew's consecration for bishop. Because of that, an even more surprising fact is a note on him present in the miracle book and repeated by *GB*:

Þat er öllum mönnum kunnigt á Íslandi, at Guðmundr byskup átti mest traust ok trúnað, þar sem var Þorvarðr, föðurbróðir hans, ok Ögmundr sneis, sonr hans, ok Einarr klerkr ok Þorvarðr Ögmundarson [...] ok hverr unni öðrum hugastum.⁵⁰

This example clearly depicts Þorvarðr as a very positive figure, one of the bishop's most trusted men, which would surprise the audience familiar with the events that took place before Guðmundr became a bishop. Þorvarðr's indifference towards his nephew's fate and very limited contact were the arguments the bishop-elect used in his quarrel with his uncle, who eagerly supported the election hoping he would therefore gain more power in the Northern quarter. The fact that he retired to a monastery in a later phase of his life, might have rehabilitated him in the eyes of the authors who used that fact in order to depict him as a trustworthy relative of the saint.

5.5. Ögmundr Þorvarðsson *sneis*, the son of Þorvarðr, seems, on the other hand, to have been the only close family member who gave Guðmundr his full support. His involvement in family affairs has been

⁴⁹ *GP*, ch. 25 and *GA*, ch. 99. In *GB* that part is missing, and in *GD* it is a part of ch. 20, where the dialogue between Þorvarðr and Guðmundr is modified and the chieftain is not mentioned by name.

⁵⁰ "It is known to all the people in Iceland that Bishop Guðmundr had most trust and good faith in Þorvarðr who was his paternal uncle, Ögmundr *sneis*, his [Þorvarðr's] son, the cleric Einarr and Þorvarðr Ögmundarson [...] and loved one another sincerely" (*GJtb*, ch. 6; *GB*, ch. 120).

depicted in *GP* as entirely positive, e.g. Ögmundr skilfully fought for his uncle's rights during the trading voyage with Ingimundr.⁵¹ Hosting Guðmundr at Háls, Ögmundr acted as if he were genuinely surprised at his cousin's humble attitude towards the result of the episcopal election. The chieftain referred to their childhood games and tried to convince Guðmundr to follow the example of St. Ambrose. Ögmundr's reply concerning obedience to his cousin's episcopal authority is very carefully constructed: "For whose misconduct should you be more responsible than for mine? Yet, even though I am disobedient to you, I should be much more reluctant to obey any other men".⁵²

That "diplomatic" statement places Ögmundr in a safe position: officially he convinced Guðmundr to accept the results of the election. Ögmundr expressed his lack of understanding for his cousin's hesitation. However, being himself a chieftain and son of Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson, he must have been aware of the difficulties to come. The fact that Ögmundr considered being disobedient to Guðmundr as a possibility might suggest his awareness of being forced to choose between supporting his cousin and supporting others (for instance his father) in the near future. Nevertheless, Ögmundr reassured Guðmundr that he should help him "as usual".⁵³

After the fight at Viðines on 9 September 1208, Ögmundr did not seem to be active in Guðmundr's following, although he is not mentioned by any author of *Guðmundar sögur* as joining the enemies either. As Arngrímr has noted, it was the bishop's merits that saved Ögmundr from "all the evildoings".⁵⁴ According to *Ísls* he joined the chieftains Kolbeinn Arnórsson *ungi* (c. 1208–1245) and Órækja Snorrason (of Sturlungar, c. 1205–1245) against the attack of Sighvatr Sturluson after Easter 1234. An authorial comment reports that Ögmundr "was then about eighty years old but said to be the most valiant warrior in the company".⁵⁵ It is difficult to explain why Ögmundr did not support Guðmundr in any other way. He lived approximately as long as the

⁵¹ *GP*, chs. 12–13; *GA*, chs. 28–9; *GB*, chs. 24–26.

⁵² *GP*, ch. 24 and *GA*, ch. 98.

⁵³ *GP*, ch. 24 and *GA*, ch. 98. It is uncertain when exactly Ögmundr became *goðorðsmaðr*, *Ísls* mentions only that circa 1200 he shared a *goðorð* with Hallr Kleppjárnsson (ch. 18).

⁵⁴ "verðleikr herra Guðmundar" (*GD*, ch. 37).

⁵⁵ "[...] ok var hann þá á inum átta tigi vetra. Ok sögðu menn svá, at hann þætti þær þá vígligastr í því liði." (*Ísls*, ch. 98; *GB*, ch. 113).

bishop, though it is not known where and how he spent the rest of his life.

5.6. Sighvatr Sturluson. The middle Sturluson brother has received an especially negative opinion from Arngrímr: “Three brothers must be mentioned, who were not similar [...] Þórðr was the kindest of them, Snorri in the middle, and Sighvatr was the worst”.⁵⁶ When compared to *ÍslS*, *GD* presents a very different image of Sighvatr's role in particular events and his attitude towards the bishop. A few supernatural aspects of certain incidents concerning the chieftain's relationship with Guðmundr deserve a closer look.

In 1222, on the way back from Grímsey after the fight with Sighvatr Sturluson and his men, Guðmundr was asked by Sighvatr to leave the island in his boat, but refused to do it. Then the chieftain decided to take the bishop's vestments with him and allow Guðmundr to travel separately. The saint prayed that the vestments would be safe as he would have no authority without them.⁵⁷ His request was granted, but as they sailed towards Eyjafjörður a storm broke out and twenty out of Sighvatr's forty men survived.⁵⁸ In *ÍslS* Guðmundr's comment that “Sighvatr is going to end up like King Haraldr Sigurðarson” has been included in the conversation which the bishop had with Snorri Sturluson after Easter 1234.⁵⁹ The choice of referring to that particular king is not obvious. Bearing in mind that King Haraldr Sigurðarson *inn harðráði* (d. 25 September 1066) died in a battle because he had

⁵⁶ “Þrjá bræðr verðr at nefna, þótt ólíkir væri [...] Þórðr var þeirra bestr, Snorri í mið, en Sighvatr verstr” (*GD*, ch. 35).

⁵⁷ “Niota lætr þv drotin miN þa fedga sk'r'vdans mins er þeir fara eigi slikvm oforvm jdag sem menn þeira”. Of all the sources, this remark is only recorded in *GB*, ch. 108. *ÍslS* and all the fourteenth-century variants mention Guðmundr's use of the vestments in the scene of the first excommunication of Kolbeinn. The crozier especially symbolizes the power and authority he had as a bishop, which is very symbolic here as that authority had been questioned by Sighvatr.

⁵⁸ *GA*, ch. 206; *GB*, ch. 108. According to *GB* only two survived. *GA* only provides a short note on the fact that Guðmundr left in Sighvatr's vessel and that Guðmundr prayed for revenge, which came a while later (the storm). The author, commenting on the victims of the storm, is convinced that the situation resulted from the saint's prayers (“Sýnist mér svá sem guð hafi heyrð bæn Guðmundar byskups bæði þá ok endrnær”).

⁵⁹ The author of *GB*, on the other hand, has placed it in the passage that reports the Grímsey episode.

overestimated his power, Guðmundr's comment is most probably an allusion to Sighvatr's pride and arrogance.

According to *GD* one day Sighvatr expressed curiosity about Guðmundr's supernatural abilities and had his son Sturla ask the bishop how long Sighvatr could expect to live. Though he was reluctant to accept Guðmundr's answer, the premonition was indeed fulfilled.⁶⁰ It is quite interesting to observe how particular narratives differ as far as the premonition of Sighvatr's death is concerned. According to *ÍslS*, Sighvatr's brother, Þórðr, made a comment during his conversation with Sighvatr in spring 1235 that both his younger brother and the brother's sons might die soon.⁶¹ The fact that the chieftain also received a prophetic remark on his death from his own brother, Þórðr, which was recorded in *ÍslS*, is quite an interesting detail. The same source notes that Þórðr seems to have had a special connection to Guðmundr Arason, who, in return, predicted that they should both die at approximately the same time.

5.7. Þórðr Sturluson, the oldest of the Sturluson brothers, has been given a very positive role in Guðmundr's life, especially by Arngrímr Brandsson. The author has included in his variant a comment that Þórðr was "in all ways Guðmundr's most faithful friend".⁶² *ÍslS* as well as *GA* and *GB* certainly show in many passages that Þórðr, contrary to his brothers, supported the bishop, though such a close relationship between those two men is nowhere stated explicitly. In the chapter devoted to Þórðr Sturluson's death Arngrímr presents the chieftain's affection for Guðmundr, his grief because of the man's difficult situation and the political situation in Iceland in general. Already *ÍslS* mentions that Þórðr was aware of his own and Guðmundr's ill health and regretted that they wouldn't be able to see each other again, although the bishop's message sent to the chieftain assured him of a meeting in spring 1237.⁶³ However, since they both died at more or less the same time, which indeed was spring 1237, this remark obviously meant meeting in the life after death, which has explicitly been pointed out by

⁶⁰ *GD*, ch. 69. Guðmundr commented that Sighvatr would die shortly after he has heard about Kygri-Björn's (Björn Hjaltason's) death. The priest died in 1238.

⁶¹ "Svá mikill sem þú þykkist nú ok truíst á mátt þinn ok sona þinna, þá munu fáir vetr líða, áðr þat mun mælt, at þar sé mest eftir sik orðit" (*ÍslS*, ch. 114).

⁶² "Þórðr var alla götu inn trúasti vin herra Guðmundar byskups" (*GD*, ch. 35).

⁶³ *ÍslS*, ch. 117; *GD*, ch. 76.

Arngrímr Brandsson.⁶⁴ Guðmundr reportedly had predicted the chieftain's death as following his own.⁶⁵ In other words, the chieftain was granted an especially privileged position, a unique connection with the saint.

5.8. Snorri Sturluson. As far as one of the most influential chieftains in Iceland at the time is concerned, his participation in Guðmundr's life is even more problematic than that of Kolbeinn or Þórðr. On one hand, this chieftain is depicted as rather "neutral", if not indifferent towards him. Arngrímr places Snorri somewhere halfway between the bishop's supporters and his opponents since the chieftain was on Guðmundr's side in the most difficult moments.⁶⁶ As a matter of fact, Snorri took part in the meeting arranged by Þorvaldr Gizurarson where the first big assault on the bishop was planned, for which the archbishop summoned him in the letter addressed to all the chieftains who acted against Guðmundr Arason and the Church. Still, Snorri invited the bishop home after he had been expelled from Hólar for the first time in 1209,⁶⁷ then after he had attended the general assembly in 1227 (with a following),⁶⁸ and again after the general assembly in 1231 (also with a following).⁶⁹ *GD* adds that after the fight at Hólar in 1209 Snorri was the one who asked the bishop for mercy and prayer for those who were on the verge of death.⁷⁰

Eiríkr Magnússon, referring to Guðmundr's stay at Reykholt in 1209–10, wrote that Guðmundr "regarded Snorri more in the light of a friend than a foe".⁷¹ It is interesting that this prominent individual

⁶⁴ "[...] hafi fundizt í andligu lífi" (*GD*, ch. 76).

⁶⁵ *GD*, ch. 35. *GB*, ch. 84 contains a very similar story to that about Guðmundr's prophecy about Þórðr's death. Only here the man introduced as "mikill vin G(vdmvndar) byskups" is called Þórðr Böðvarsson. It is difficult to explain why the author decided to include the passage here. Þórðr Böðvarsson was Þórðr Sturluson's maternal uncle and a powerful man. It is hard to state with certainty that the bishop's friendship with Þórðr Sturluson was fabricated. Arngrímr's version might only give it a slightly deeper dimension.

⁶⁶ "Snorri var í mið [...] því at hann stóð í uvina flokki herra byskups, en sýndi honum þó stundum nökkvern manndóm, þá er harðast gekk" (*GD*, ch. 35).

⁶⁷ *ÍsLS*, ch. 24; *GA*, ch. 62; *GB*, ch. 95; *GD*, ch. 36.

⁶⁸ *ÍsLS*, ch. 62; *GA*, ch. 95.

⁶⁹ *ÍsLS*, ch. 81; *GA*, ch. 95.

⁷⁰ *GD*, ch. 36.

⁷¹ Eiríkr Magnússon, 'The Last of the Icelandic Commonwealth', p. 330.

does not seem to have had a greater impact on Guðmundr's ecclesiastical or saintly career. No records of miracle stories in which Snorri Sturluson was involved, or of other supernatural events, are available in the extant material.

5.9. Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, of Seldælir, was another chieftain, beside Þórðr Sturluson, presented consistently as Guðmundr's supporter at all times, in a much more active way than Þórðr. Hrafn is presented for the first time as Guðmundr's "friend" and desired company on the bishop-elect's consecration trip to Norway in different variants of the *vita*. The chieftain is depicted as a skilled traveller and a religious man in various sources.⁷² *Hrafn's saga* underlines also his medical skills and portrays his piety in a hagiographical manner. Chapter 4 mentions the chieftain's visit to the shrine of Thomas Becket in Canterbury, of St. Giles/Egidius at Saint-Giles, of St. James in Compostella, as well as a journey to Rome where he "committed his life into the hands of God's apostles and other holy men".⁷³ Hrafn gave offerings to shrines and purchased relics, and his death was portrayed almost as the death of a martyr, which was carefully noted by Arngrímr Brandsson in *GD*.⁷⁴ It has been suggested that the image of Hrafn as depicted in his saga is that of a potential saint.⁷⁵ However, his fame did not develop beyond the reputation of a pious chieftain. Nevertheless, it must have been meaningful for Guðmundr's biographers who listed this individual among his supporters.

ÍslS and *GA* give a short and somewhat enigmatic account on the gifts Hrafn had received from Guðmundr at some point: a "sunstone" (*sólarsteinn*) and, apparently, "a woman's dress with a richly coloured border" ("kvennkyrtill með hlöðum blábrúnað"). The gifts were stolen

⁷² *GP*, chs. 27 and 29; *GD*, ch. 22. *GA*, chs. 114–5 and *GB*, chs. 78–9 describe the journey and Hrafn's piety as well as devotion to Guðmundr is obvious, though the explicit comment is missing.

⁷³ "[...] ok fal líf sitt á hendi guðs postolum ok öðrum helgum mönnum". I have used here Guðrún P. Helgadóttir's edition in which the prose text is based on the A1 transcript (AM 155 fol., made 1639–1662).

⁷⁴ Ch. 26.

⁷⁵ Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, 'Introduction'; Ásdís Egilsdóttir, 'Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, Pilgrim and Martyr', in *Sagas, Saints and Settlements*. The Northern World. North Europe and the Baltic c. 400–1700 AD. Peoples, Economies and Cultures 2, ed. by Gareth Williams and Paul Bibire (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), 29–39.

after the assassination of Hrafn in 1213 by his murderers who, however, decided to throw the dress away after a while since it did not look good to them. As soon as they got to the shore, they also got rid of the stone since it did not look appealing any more. The goods were found afterwards.⁷⁶

Arngrímur had worked on the presentation of a wider context and supplied the account with some additional information. According to his variant Hrafn was presented with “náttúraðan kristallum ok rauðbrúnaðan kyrtíl hlaðbúinn”.⁷⁷ The description of the tunic is, though, less surprising, especially since, as the author notes, Hrafn and Guðmundr decided to swap each other's tunics as a symbol of their friendship, since it was the bishop's friendship the chieftain asked for, not a material gift as the chieftain explained.⁷⁸ As far as the “crystal” is concerned, its nature and use is very much debated. Peter Foote has made an attempt to examine the problem, but the question remains unsolved.⁷⁹ The earliest *sólarsteinn* is mentioned in the documentary evidence only in 1318 and the identification of the stone Hrafn received from Guðmundr, as well as its purpose, remains unknown.

The fact that the chieftain does not appear more often in any source about Guðmundr is difficult to explain. One of many reasons might be the fact that the authors often underlined the saint's popularity among all the layers of the Icelandic society without too much focus on the presence of the most powerful individuals (listing a few events might seem enough). Besides, Hrafn's involvement in the argument with Þorvaldr Snorrason (of Vatnsfirðingar), which gained in intensity

⁷⁶ *Ísls*, ch. 30; *GA*, ch. 154; *GB*, 79. *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* that describes Hrafn's life after his journey to Norway with Guðmundr presents still another version of the events: the chieftain was presented with a *stöðhross góð ok sólarstein* (ch. 1). Neither the cloth nor any special relation to the bishop is mentioned at all, though Hrafn is presented as a righteous and deeply religious man. After Hrafn's death the chieftain's possessions were looted and the stone was taken, but thrown away before the looters loaded their ship and left. The incident is commented upon the following way: “Þann atburð virðu svá margir, at því máttu þeir Þorvaldr eigi sólarsteininn með sér hafa, at Guðmundr biskup hefði áttan.” (ch. 19).

⁷⁷ *GD*, ch. 26.

⁷⁸ Both men, as Arngrímur explains, had similar tunics, of the type rich men used to wear. Guðmundr predicted that, though such gifts should be inherited by the friend's sons, the inheritance would not be easy and direct. That premonition was fulfilled after Hrafn's death when the sons had to look for the stolen valuables.

⁷⁹ Peter Foote, “Icelandic *sólarsteinn* and the medieval background” in *Aurvandlistá. Norse Studies*. The Viking Collection, 2 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1994), 140–54.

after Guðmundr's consecration, hardly gave him many opportunities to participate in the bishop's life.

Another important individual who actively supported Guðmundr during his episcopacy was Aron Hjörleifsson. Although he was not a chieftain, his significance for the Icelandic political scene ensured him a separate saga.

5.10. Aron Hjörleifsson, king's retainer (*hirðmaður*).⁸⁰ Aron was one of the men who went with bishop Guðmundr to Malmey in 1221, after Tumi Sighvatsson (1198–1222) had conferred with the men of Skagafjörður about becoming their leader and driving away Guðmundr's people. There are a few incidents that reveal his special connection with Guðmundr. When asked by the bishop about the wish to confess before the fight, Aron stated that he had no time for that. Guðmundr gave him his blessing and answered that they should see each other again.⁸¹ During the fight Aron was severely wounded but survived, which could be interpreted as the fulfilment of a dream he had had before the struggle: of Guðmundr laying his cloak over him.⁸² Aron himself recalled the dream at Geirþófsfjarðareyri in 1224, in a conversation with two visitors when they mentioned that Sturla's men were after him.⁸³

GA presents the participation of Aron in freeing Guðmundr from captivity in a more dramatic and elaborate way than *ÍslS* and *GB* do, the report being largely based on *Arons saga*. On the night when Tumi Sighvatsson released some of his watchmen at Hólar (and when the attack from Málmey against him was being prepared), Guðmundr had

⁸⁰ Genealogy 16. According to *ÍslS*, his foster father was "a noble man", Þorlákr Ketilsson in Hitardalur, and Sturla Sighvatsson was his foster brother until they parted (*ÍslS*, ch. 33). There was some disagreement between them before that happened, though its reason is unknown.

⁸¹ *ÍslS*, ch. 44; *GB*, ch. 107.

⁸² *ÍslS*, ch. 44; *GB*, ch. 107.

⁸³ Two of them, Egil *digri* and Sigurður Eyvindsson, were earlier the bishop's men (*ÍslS*, ch. 55). According to GA, however, Aron had had the "protective" dream of the bishop laying his cloak over him the night before Sturla Sighvatsson's men attacked him (GA, ch. 216). In *Arons saga*, ch. 12 the dream is more elaborate: Guðmundr asked the chieftain to confess. Since he did not, the bishop covered him with his cloak, which is a symbol of protection.

a premonition. As he later reported to Eyjólfur (Kársson) and Aron, the night was going to present a possibility for them to solve some of their problems.⁸⁴ According to that variant of Guðmundr's *vita*, it was those two men who initiated the attack on Tumi.⁸⁵ The author has noted that Guðmundr had a special affection for Aron ("hann elskaði Aron meir enn alþýðu manna").⁸⁶ The version of the conversation before the Grímsey battle is more detailed in *GA* than that in *ÍslS*: next to the blessing and the premonition that they would see each other again, Aron was also given a command about being strong in his faith and good with poor people.⁸⁷ *GA* adds also that after the battle, Aron healed his wounds with water previously consecrated by Guðmundr, which was the only medicine he used.⁸⁸ In *GD*, on the other hand, Aron's role is reduced to the minimum, possibly to dramatize Guðmundr's lack of support and the hostility of all the powerful laymen. He is mentioned only once just before the battle at Grímsey.⁸⁹ The conversation with Guðmundr before that fight that has been included in the older variants is missing in this text, though. Arngrímur only gives a brief account of the bishop's premonition that he and Aron should see each other again.⁹⁰

Arons saga contains another interesting episode that was supposed to take place during his escape from Sturla and his men. When Aron arrived at Rauðamelur where his mother lived, and heard that Sturla knew his hiding place, he prostrated on the ground in the shape of the cross and began to pray *Benedicite* and *Ave Maria*. Afterwards he explained to his mother that it was Bishop Guðmundr who had taught him the prayers as well as the procedure of saying them. Needless to say, he continued his escape in safety.⁹¹ Later on, while staying with Chieftain Haraldr Sæmundarson (of Oddaverjar, d. 1251) in spring 1226 he enjoyed the hospitality of Haraldr and his brothers because they had been on Bishop Guðmundr's side and knew about Aron's and

⁸⁴ *GA*, ch. 180; *Arons saga*, ch. 4.

⁸⁵ Also Einar *skemmingr* *GA*, ch. 180 and 181; *Arons saga*, ch. 5.

⁸⁶ *GA*, ch. 196; *Arons saga*, ch. 7.

⁸⁷ *GA*, ch. 196; *GB*, ch. 107; *Arons saga*, ch. 7.

⁸⁸ *GA*, ch. 209; *Arons saga*, ch. 9. Since Aron also was known as a doctor (*læknir*), that remark is rather meaningful. *Arons saga*, ch. 9.

⁸⁹ *GD*, ch. 58.

⁹⁰ The role of Eyjólfur Kársson, however, seems to be extended in *GD*, and, obviously, at the cost of Aron's.

⁹¹ *Arons saga*, ch. 14.

Guðmundr's friendship. For the same reason he was well received in Norway when he travelled to Trondheim later the same year.⁹² Closing the final chapter of the saga, the author expressed the hope that his soul had been saved both "thanks to Bishop Guðmundr 'the Good's' intercession and all his merits".⁹³

The author of *Arons saga* is unknown, but the fact that he has devoted many passages to Guðmundr might indeed suggest that the narrative was written around the middle of the fourteenth century in the context of the campaign for Guðmundr's canonization. Its account of Aron's achievements is less objective than that included by Sturla Þórðarsson in *Ísls*. The image of Aron is far more heroic, which gives his devotion for Guðmundr a greater significance.

Ambrosius saga provides a few convincing examples of the advantages powerful laymen had over their opponents when the bishop was on their side. The pious emperor Theodosius had a vision in which two saints John and Philip told him that the bishop Ambrose had prayed for him and, therefore, God would ensure him victory.⁹⁴ Also Earl Arbogastes was successful thanks to his friendly relationship with Bishop Ambrose who prayed for him.⁹⁵ Those examples, probably well known among the literate upper classes in thirteenth century Iceland, are a relevant metaphor in the context of Guðmundr's conflict with some chieftains. Kolbeinn Tumason and Sigurðr Ormsson were the beneficiaries of quite a few miracles during the peaceful years and, very generally speaking, their success might have also been perceived as the result of Guðmundr's friendship.

The feast of Ambrose as a Holy Day of Obligation was introduced in Iceland in 1179, that is: before the ordination of Guðmundr as priest. It is uncertain to what degree the cult of that prelate really inspired him, as the authors of the narratives suggest. Margaret Cormack suggests that while Þorlákr might have looked up to Ambrose during his struggles with the chieftains, Guðmundr might have been responsible

⁹² *Arons saga*, ch. 15. Aron's father and Guðmundr who were there at the time pleaded also to jarl Skúli to let Aron leave for Jerusalem right away, but without success. Aron did go to Jerusalem, but some time (possibly a year) later.

⁹³ "[...] fyrir meðalgöngu vinar síns, ins góða Guðmundar biskups Arasonar" (*Arons saga*, ch. 22).

⁹⁴ *Ambrosius saga byskups*, ch. 16. Not to mention the fact that Ambrose's virtue made the Roman emperor Theodosius do penance and obey the holy man.

⁹⁵ *Ambrosius saga byskups*, ch. 18.

for choosing Ambrose as co-patron of the church at Höfði where he was a priest from 1185–7.⁹⁶ According to *GD*, during Guðmundr's episcopacy Monk Gunnlaugr Leifsson composed “novam historiam sancti Ambrosii”.⁹⁷ However, when he decided to recite it in the church without the bishop's permission, Guðmundr came in and forbade him the introduction of any innovation without his approval under the ban of excommunication (adding also that Pope Gregory's composition was much better). The story alludes not as much to the special bond between the two saints as to Guðmundr's episcopal authority, which was frequently questioned and disobeyed during those years.

Another reference to Gregory the Great's writings brings actual episcopal duties into focus. Gregory's *Book of Pastoral Rule* (*Regulae Pastoralis Liber*) which gave the outline for episcopal duties put the care of souls and spiritual instruction first. Administration of the see, education of junior clergy and formal jurisdiction came later. For many reasons *Guðmundar sögur* follow that pattern. The practice of the three fundamental elements of the medieval bishop's competence and authority, *potestas ordinis*, *potestas magisterii* and *potestas iurisdictionis*, is little evident in Guðmundr's *vitae*.⁹⁸ As far as the compulsory spreading of Christian education is concerned, the “foundation” of a school at Hólar which supposedly took place after Guðmundr's return from Norway is a significant thing to mention by the hagiographers.⁹⁹ However, such a school had already been founded by Jón Ögmundarsson as his hagiographers report, so it is rather difficult to explain the authorial intentions of attributing such a fact to Guðmundr (other than a wish to increase the list of his merits).¹⁰⁰ Eiríkr Magnússon has not only expressed no doubts about the existence of a new school during Guðmundr's episcopacy, but has also suggested that “the bishop acted on a suggestion, or perhaps a peremptory order by the archbishop”, because he had “neglected utterly education

⁹⁶ Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 77.

⁹⁷ Ch. 38.

⁹⁸ Kauko Pirinen, ‘Biskop’, in *KLNM* I, 609–25. We hardly learn about Guðmundr's ordinations from the variants of his *vitae*, as mentioned above. This aspect of his authority is, on the other hand, fully used in the numerous acts of consecration of wells and churches, blessing of estates, livestock and people. Also Guðmundr's educational activity had a different character to what one might expect. As for *potestas iurisdictionis*, spending long periods of time away from his see, he was hardly able to execute any. The few cases recorded are the excommunications.

⁹⁹ *ÍsLS*, ch. 36; *GA*, ch. 161; *GB*, ch. 103; *GD*, ch. 53.

¹⁰⁰ *JS*, ch. 8.

within his diocese".¹⁰¹ Having taken into consideration Guðmundr's travels, both voluntary as well as exile caused by the conflicts, it is difficult not to understand why the narratives barely mention any educational activity. The sagas concerning other Icelandic bishops, both those of Hólar and those of Skálholt, hardly devote much attention to the cathedral schools. If they do, it is usually a passage (or few) underlining the establishment of a school and/or teaching which, however, is barely referred to later in the narrative. Teaching and scholarly activity is hardly a leading topic in any of the *biskupa sögur*.

Guðmundr's greatest input in the matter of education throughout the saga material seems to have been discussions with the clergy and ordinary people. Guðmundr's teaching, writing and reading are underlined in the passages referring to his priestly career. Ironically, the difficult circumstances of Guðmundr's episcopacy and his involvement in struggles with powerful laymen helped the biographers create a different ideal of a bishop saint. It has been suggested that the virtues most highly valued by the Icelandic bishops' sagas were "interpersonal skills and efficacy at work".¹⁰² However, each of the holy bishops seems to have exercised those in a different way. Guðmundr's interpersonal skills were not that well demonstrated in his mediation with the authoritarian laymen, and his efficacy at work did not mean excellent administration of the episcopal see or introduction of new laws.

Quite a few imported sagas of holy bishops which had been translated into Old Icelandic focus on the issues proposed by Gregory the Great in *Cura Pastoralis*.¹⁰³ Mainly the sagas concerning early bishops are of consideration here (*Martinus saga*, *Augustinus saga*, etc.). Vernacular sagas of the Icelandic holy bishops other than *Guðmundar sögur* do not repeat the pattern; administration and jurisdiction seem to be very much in focus in those narratives.¹⁰⁴ The fact that the sagas about Guðmundr follow Gregory's ideal and are in agreement with *Heilagra Manna Sögur* could be perceived as another example of reference to

¹⁰¹ Eiríkr Magnússon, p. 332. An interesting matter that has been discussed by many scholars was also the nationality of the master, Þórðr *ufsi*. Eiríkr Magnússon, 'The Last of the Icelandic Commonwealth', p. 332 and Magnús Stefánsson, 'Kirkjuvald eflist', p. 131 have claimed that he was Norwegian, while Jón Jóhannesson has suggested that Þórðr was a foreigner, but has not specified where from (Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga*, p. 245).

¹⁰² Hunt, *A Study of Authorial Perspective*, p. 231.

¹⁰³ Hunt, *A Study of Authorial Perspective*, p. 201.

¹⁰⁴ Hunt, *A Study of Authorial Perspective*, pp. 200–5.

communio sanctorum. By creating an image of a bishop who makes a direct contact with the faithful and moves around the country (often forced to do it) instead of spending time on formal duties at his see, the authors allude to the basics of Christianity. The main emphasis has been put on the direct and frequent contact with people of different social background and occupations, many of them being women.

CHAPTER SIX

THE INFALLIBLE SUPPORTERS: WOMEN AND SAINTS

6.1. *The Virgin Mary and other saints*

An interesting event has been recorded in *Martinus saga*: Gallus and Sulpicius, Martin's two students, once heard the bishop talk to somebody in his room. When asked about the visitors, Martin answered, "Maria, Agnes and Tecla talked to me"; the apostles Peter and Paul used to appear to the bishop quite often as well.¹ The narratives concerning Guðmundr also contain numerous examples of his acquaintance with various saints, which he seems to have acquired and developed during the period of his priesthood, the most important one being the Virgin Mary. The famous incident that occurred at Svínafell might serve as an illustration here. Guðmundr went to see an elderly, bed-ridden, pious woman. He entered the house, kissed her and told her to carry with her at the moment of death Guðmundr's "greetings to Mary, the Mother of God, and to the Archangel Michael, to John the Baptist, to Peter and Paul, to King Óláfr, and especially to his friend Ambrose". The old woman, who had, apparently, been lying in bed silent and motionless, answered "yes", as everyone could hear.²

The thirteenth century witnessed a significant growth in popularity of the Marian cult, when the role of the Virgin as a mediatrix between people and God gained in importance.³ She was "the most frequent supernatural guest during the thirteenth century", as Michael Goodich has observed.⁴ In northern Europe the most frequent recipients of visits from the Virgin were saints associated with the Cistercian order.⁵

¹ *Martinus saga byskups* I, ch. 36; *Martinus saga byskups* II, ch. 36; *Martinus saga byskups* III, ch. 35 (36).

² GP, ch. 22; GA, ch. 93; GB, ch. 66.

³ Swanson, *Religion and Devotion*, pp. 144–5, Ronald C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims. Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995, pp. 195–202; Donna Spivey Ellington *From sacred body to angelic soul: understanding Mary in late medieval and early modern Europe* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 102–41.

⁴ Goodich, *Vita perfecta*, p. 117.

⁵ Goodich, *Vita perfecta*, p. 117.

The cult of Virgin Mary in Iceland, especially in the northern diocese, seems to have been dominated by the presence of two Benedictine monasteries. It was very extensive, and many of the gifts included the distribution of alms on her feasts.⁶ Since the authors of *Guðmundar sögur* either were Benedictines or were affiliated in the monasteries, it is no surprise that the Virgin plays such a significant role in the narratives. She was also the patron saint of Hólar cathedral and the majority of the vows from miracle collections which involve recitation of the *Ave* appear to be from the north.⁷

The Virgin Mary's *vita* and *miracula* are found in numerous manuscripts written in the thirteenth century and later, and all the images recorded in the evidence that has survived to our times were also most probably acquired by the churches in the thirteenth century.⁸ Her saga is attributed to Priest Kygri-Björn Hjaltason (d. 1237 or 1238). One collection of miracles is said to have been translated "at the order of King Hákon of Norway" during the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century; the King of Norway could either be Hákon Hákonarson (k. 1217–1263) or Hákon Magnússon (k. 1299–1319).⁹ In Iceland, as mentioned above, the Chieftain Kolbeinn Tumason was allegedly the author of verses in the Virgin's honour and had the church of Víðimýri dedicated to her. She was the patron saint of a large number of churches and is also named in the dedication (or represented by an image) at eighty percent of the churches with extant *máldagar*. It is hardly possible to establish the chronology of the cult, but it must have developed in the twelfth century—the dedication of the Hólar cathedral might indicate that. The situation in the diocese of Skálholt seems to have been different. St. Þorlákr was supposed to have read the Hours of the Virgin as part of his daily devotions, but the cult of the Virgin Mary never reached the same level as it did at Hólar.¹⁰

⁶ Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, pp. 126–9.

⁷ Hans Bekker-Nielsen and Ole Widding, 'Maria. Norge, Island', in *KLNM* XI, 363–7.

⁸ The list of the churches has been published in Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 128.

⁹ Both were known as patrons of translators; the latter was responsible for the Bible translation/commentary known as *Stjórn*. See also Ole Widding, 'Marialegender. Norge, Island', in *KLNM* XI, 402–4.

¹⁰ *ÞA*, ch. 16. The *Ave* became part of obligatory Christian knowledge during the course of the thirteenth century, the *Icelandic Homily Book* and composition of *Jóns saga* can both be dated to circa 1200. *Ave* is mentioned along with the *Pater* in about half the vows to Jón which promise prayers, possibly because Hólar Cathedral was

Guðmundr's devotion to the Virgin Mary during the period of his priesthood is widely commented upon in all the narratives concerning him. *GP* mentions his visit at Svínafell where he asked the pious dying woman to take his greetings to heaven, one of the recipients being, naturally, Christ's mother. The authors of the fourteenth-century variants went further and described a message revealed by the Virgin Mary to an insane woman at Flatey, in which the saint called Guðmundr her friend. Being called a "friend" by the very Mother of God was an exceptional promotion for him. The motif of "holy friendship" is also mentioned during the incident at Svínafell, when Guðmundr referred to Ambrose as his friend. However, the Flatey story bears more significance because of the Virgin Mary's rank and also because it was she, during this special intervention, who revealed the connection between herself and Guðmundr.¹¹

The image of the Virgin Mary as a mother has influenced a number of miracle stories in which her aid is sought or received in addition to that provided by other saints. Guðmundr Arason is no exception here. *GD* describes a case of a poor woman named Arnbjörg from Fljótshverfi in the bishopric of Skálholt. Her pregnancy lasted about half a year longer than expected and Arnbjörg suffered a great deal. The woman called on "the Virgin Mary and her noble friend, Bishop Guðmundr the Good".¹² On the feast of the Annunciation (25 March)

dedicated to the Virgin, or because the spread of her cult developed faster in the northern diocese. Of all vows to Þorlákr only one mentions the *Ave* (Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 54).

¹¹ The concept of friendship in Medieval Europe and in Iceland during the Commonwealth period is a complex issue (*Friendship in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Julian Haseldine (Stroud: Sutton, 1999) and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 'Vennskap i det norrøne samfunnet ca. 1000–1300', *Arr, Idéhistorisk tidsskrift* 1 (2004), 67–76). As mentioned above, the term is used rather freely in the Icelandic hagiographical sources. The following and the preceding chapters demonstrate that the word was used in reference to the representatives of the upper layers of society as well as the lower ones in the sagas concerning Guðmundr. There is no pattern as far as the "importance" of particular individuals is concerned: the closest "friend", Þorgeirr Brandsson, is barely mentioned in the narratives while another individual whom Guðmundr grants special affection, Aron Hjörleifsson, plays a decisive role in them. The fact that anonymous poor people who randomly appear in miracle stories are also introduced as Guðmundr's friends is not only important for creating his image as that of "the Father of the Poor", but also to demonstrate the variety of people who were close to the saint. Those stories contribute to the image of Guðmundr as an approachable saint, respected by and popular among very different social groups.

¹² "jungfrú Máriam ok hennar virðuliga vin, inn góða Guðmundr biskup" (*GD*, ch. 79).

she was taken to church where she prayed and drank “Guðmundr’s water”. After a while she fell into a doze and saw both the Virgin Mary and Guðmundr approach her. The holy prelate sat at Arnbjörg’s shoulders, and the Virgin put her hands on the woman’s womb and pressed it hard. A baby boy was born, but he was not to stay with his mother. The Virgin Mary announced that she was taking him to heaven with her. As proof of this intervention to anyone who wouldn’t believe Arnbjörg, the Virgin predicted that winter would soon vanish. Arnbjörg spread the news and, indeed, the prediction was fulfilled.

Another, similar, story features Guðmundr alone. He appeared on the day of his commemoration (16 March) to help a woman called Þorný whose pregnancy was due in the summer, but she began to bleed heavily at Christmas and was in great pain for weeks.¹³ Guðmundr performed a similar act to that by the Virgin Mary from the other story, but although the text makes it clear that the woman was restored to health, no baby is mentioned this time.

There are six Icelandic narratives of this kind, all datable to the first half of the fourteenth century; one has been preserved in *Þorláks saga*, and three in *Maríu saga*, and it cannot be stated with certainty which variant inspired the other stories.¹⁴ What they all have in common is the rather unclear diagnosis which creates doubts as to what really happened. Several possibilities have been suggested: dealing with miscarriage or other prenatal problems, phantom pregnancy or a misdiagnosis of some other sickness (after all, in the second story it is stated that the woman “was *thought* to carry a living child”/“með barni kviku þóttist vera”), even abortion and infanticide.¹⁵ What is quite striking is that the women are not only relieved, but they regain their slim, girlish appearance and no trace of any painful or complicated process (including blood) is left. That could be interpreted as a wish to be cured of some sickness, perhaps even unwanted pregnancy or one that would cause problems for the woman. The issue of morality appears again when the Virgin Mary tells Arnbjörg to fast on bread and water each year before the feast of the Annunciation, recite the Ave Maria

¹³ *GD*, ch. 80.

¹⁴ There are also a few examples known outside Iceland, e.g. in Ireland (Margaret Cormack, ‘Better off Dead’ in *Sanctity in the North: Saints, Lives and Cults in Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. by Thomas DuBois (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2007, pp. 334–352).

¹⁵ Cormack, ‘Better off Dead’, p. 336.

seven times every day, and not to “take an unlawful man from now on”. The woman was allowed to get married though, which clearly indicates that perhaps the cause of her problem was an illicit relationship. Since the story is included in *GD*, such an approach would hardly be surprising, as Arngrímr has demonstrated a conservative attitude towards the issues of morality on quite a few occasions. In the story about Þorný she vows to order three masses for the souls of Guðmundr’s parents. It is one of six different stories where the mass for his relatives is volunteered, which is not a common vow; the reason could be their informal relationship which would put their eternal salvation in danger.

However, *GD* is not the narrative in which this particular intention (that is: the mass, *sálumessa*, for Guðmundr’s parents) is promised. Þorný’s story is, in fact, an exception; all the other ones are extant in the miracle book and *GB*. The vows were made in order to receive aid in the following cases: stillbirth (*GJtb*, ch. 33/*GB*, ch. 144h, three masses), pain in the eyes and feet (*GJtb*, ch. 31/*GB*, ch. 144b, three masses) and a storm (*GJtb*, ch. 36/*GB*, ch. 145c, one mass). A mass for the souls of Guðmundr’s parents was also offered to have a cow healed (*GJtb*, ch. 33/*GB*, ch. 144g). It is rather interesting to observe that parents were not the only relatives of the saints who received the attention of the faithful. In still another story which is extant in narratives concerning Guðmundr, a mass for his paternal grandmother’s soul (*föðurmóðir*) is mentioned (*GJtb*, ch. 29/*GB*, ch. 143). In the Icelandic hagiographic material concerning the native saints one more case of this kind is to be found in *JS*, ch. 27; however, here prayers, and not a mass, for Jón’s parents’ souls are listed among other vows made to stop a bleeding after an injury.¹⁶ Thus, the number of examples of this kind of a vow, although relatively small, seems to be quite exceptional as far as the narratives about Guðmundr are concerned. Since no other pattern than the frequency of the stories in a particular source material can be observed, Stefán Karlsson’s hypothesis about the active participation of Guðmundr’s relatives in the composition of both the *miracle book* and *GB* might seem quite probable.¹⁷ However, the choice of particular miracle stories, ‘facts’ or motifs depended largely on the initiative of authors and compilers of the narratives; the phrase “vér [...] vinir ok

¹⁶ The phrase *biðja fyrir* is used here.

¹⁷ See 1.2. above.

frændr Guðmundar biskups”, present elsewhere in the texts, is not a very convincing argument here.¹⁸ The concentration of stories of this particular type in *Gjtb* and *GB* is quite interesting, but not supported with any specific authorial comments or ideas, which is clearly noticeable in *GD*. Prayers for the salvation of Guðmundr’s parents might not appeal to Arngrímr who demonstrated his radical ideas about chastity and morality in many different ways, but who would not discuss it in a direct reference to the parents of the saint.

Problems with pregnancy and childbirth appear only a few times in *Guðmundar sögur*. The miracle book and *GB* list two stories about a difficult childbirth in which Guðmundr was called upon (but did not appear to the mothers/parents); in one the baby died right after birth, in the other—everything ended well.¹⁹ Margaret Cormack argues that the stories involving Guðmundr and the Virgin Mary reflect the hope of medieval Icelandic men and women not to be burdened with “another mouth to feed”, which certainly is true since medieval Iceland had scarce resources. However, taking into consideration quite a high mortality rate, and the fact that (approximately) about half of the newborns didn’t reach the age of seven, the situation shouldn’t have been that grave. Source material of various kinds reveals, in fact, that young children and teenagers were very much valued in medieval Iceland. 39 miracle stories in the extant narratives of the Icelandic holy prelates tell about aid which children received from the saints in a variety of cases: illnesses, accidents, negligence, even hauntings.²⁰ The stories concerning pregnancy and birth might reflect anxiety concerning the fragility of babies, their condition in the womb and in the first months after birth. Young children, who have already passed that difficult stage, seem to have enjoyed much more attention from the adults, and the authors of the texts. Not only was the very survival of babies concern of the parents, but also the fact that they had to be baptized as soon as possible. Otherwise, if they died before baptism, their soul might stay forever in the *limbus*, and if they were captured alive by demons, their fate would be even worse as the story of Selkolla shows. The story which Arngrímr included in his variant about a couple who

¹⁸ As mentioned above, the terms referred to, ‘friend’ and ‘relative’, were used rather freely by medieval Icelanders, which is discussed in detail in 7.2.1. and 7.2.2. below.

¹⁹ *Gjtb*, ch. 29/*GB*, ch. 143 (the baby died shortly after birth) and *Gjtb*, ch. 33/*GB*, ch. 145d (successful intercession).

²⁰ Skórzewska, ‘Sveinn einn ungr’.

lost their baby on the way to church while trying to cross the river, is a fine contrast to Selkolla's fate. The piety and care of the parents is underlined by the author and valued higher than the actual "price" of the miracle—no gifts or prayers were vowed to Guðmundr for saving the baby's life as the couple were "too devastated to think of any".²¹ The stories about saints who were ready to help or about the Virgin Mary taking a newborn to heaven must have appeared a good consolation to women who experienced prenatal difficulties, even though the beneficiaries of the miracles were not able to enjoy their motherhood.

During his episcopacy Guðmundr spent quite a few years in Norway. Before the return trip to Iceland in 1226, Guðmundr went to St. Mary's Church in Bergen, prayed for a good journey and placed himself under her command "as he used to do".²² On the following night the Virgin Mary visited him in his sleep and revealed to him many things concerning "Iceland and other places".²³ *GJtb* does not reveal any of them and the authors of *GB* and *GD* repeat this record. In Arngrím's version Guðmundr's Norwegian encounter with the Virgin Mary is depicted in a slightly more elaborate way than it is in the other sagas. The author has not revealed any details of the message except for the speculation that the Virgin might have told Guðmundr about her ascension to heaven. It is known that after his return to Iceland the bishop asked one of his clerics who stayed in Norway to send him a description of Elisabeth of Schönau's vision and Arngrím decided to devote a few substantial paragraphs to it.²⁴ The vision he himself received is not reported by the narratives. It is only noted that Guðmundr informed his most trusted men ("æztum sínum trúnaðarmönnum") about it. Apparently, he had received the Virgin's blessing as they parted.²⁵

The presence of the Virgin Mary was, in general, much more significant during Guðmundr's episcopacy than it was during the period

²¹ "En eigi kom þeim til minnis at heita, því at þeim sýndist þat yfir megn" (*GD*, ch. 84).

²² *GJtb* ch. 6; *GB*, ch. 120; *GD*, ch. 64.

²³ "[...] ok sagði honum marga hluti, þá er hann vissi eigi áðr, bæði af Íslandi ok annars staðar". *GD*, ch. 64 has a different comment: "Sagði hún honum marga hluti fyrir, bæði úorðna ok umliðna mjök í fjárka".

²⁴ *GD*, ch. 71. The letter itself is dated to, approximately, 1227–1234, see *DI* II, 129., pp. 507–11.

²⁵ *GD*, ch. 64.

of his priesthood, and the popularity of her cult in Iceland at the time is underlined by the narratives. Kolbeinn Tumason's ill will against Guðmundr and the faith which the bishop represented was punished in the aforementioned incident at Hólar from 1208, where, during the Marian Mass (8 September), he was unable to hear the bells. Kolbeinn's wife's concern about the chieftain's soul certainly seemed justified under those circumstances. The bishop had, however, no doubts about the fact that the mercy of the Virgin should be granted to Kolbeinn for the sake of his earlier documented faithfulness to the Mother of Christ, that is, the composition of the Marian poem, as well as Guðmundr's appeal. The fourteenth century authors of *Guðmundar sögur* clearly agree on the use of the concept of the Virgin as a merciful mother and a mighty protector.

It is especially visible in various miracle stories such as those that involved the support of the poor or the incidents in which people offered their hospitality to the bishop and his following. "Mary shall reward you" was usually Guðmundr's reply to the generous offers.²⁶ The Virgin Mary as a generous provider is also mentioned in the story about the little boy who asked Guðmundr for some new clothes and lied that he did not have any.²⁷ The Norwegian miracle of dividing a silver bowl among three beggars includes Guðmundr's lecture delivered to the clerics who were sceptical about his generosity: the object would be given, in fact, to God and the Virgin Mary through the beggars, and the act of almsgiving was the noblest one.²⁸

The bishop's devotion to the Virgin was exclusive. According to an account reported in all the narratives concerning Guðmundr, a deacon (*messudjárn*) named Þorkell who lived at Svínanes was supposed to conduct an evening service but forgot the beginning of *Magnificat*. He tried singing the *Antiphone* three times but still was not able to continue with the psalm. At that time a ship with Bishop Guðmundr aboard arrived and the deacon guessed that his inability to sing that evening had one reason: Guðmundr was the one meant to do that.²⁹

²⁶ "Máría launi þér" (*GJtb*, chs. 9 and 10, also 17, 19; *GB*, chs. 123, 124, 134, 135; *GD*, ch. 65. In *GJtb*, ch. 9 and *GB*, ch. 123 also John the Baptist is mentioned. In *GJtb*, ch. 13 and *GB*, ch. 129 a woman begged Guðmundr to provide her with some food for her children in the name of the Virgin Mary. A cow offered to the Virgin is mentioned in *GJtb*, ch. 7 and *GB*, ch. 121.

²⁷ *GJtb*, ch. 16; *GB*, ch. 133. See 7.3.2. below.

²⁸ *GJtb*, ch. 4; *GB*, ch. 118.

²⁹ *GJtb*, ch. 15; *GB*, ch. 130; *GD*, ch. 54.

In Arngrímr's variant of Guðmundr Arason's *vita* it is underlined that already as priest he loved and worshipped Mary above all other saints, and the poem by Einarr Gilsson that follows the statement emphasizes Guðmundr's devotion.³⁰ According to Arngrímr Brandsson, this was just another aspect in which he followed the noble example of St. Ambrose. "The blessed Ambrose was very dear to him", explains Arngrímr.³¹ Numerous accounts in the miracle book and *Guðmundar sögur* support that argument. Guðmundr's "out of body experience", or rather, simultaneous presence in two different spots (Hof and Skálavík) was an appropriate occasion for Arngrímr to remember the incident mentioned in *Ambrosius saga* and *Martinus saga*, when Ambrose "visited" the church where Martin was being buried.³² *GD* also includes an interesting story about a shepherd who did not devote much time to making the sign of the cross or going to a service. One day he drank from a brook after work and was possessed by a demon that entered his body with the water. He ran to the area previously consecrated by Bishop Guðmundr in connection with Selkolla's presence and ate some grass that had been sprinkled with the holy water. However, his stomach could not keep it down and, after a while, the demon returned and the man died. In this context Arngrímr recalls a story from Ambrose's life, about a possessed man who was healed by the bishop, but, shortly afterwards, attacked by the demon again. The author's comment is rather remarkable. He explains that the deeds of holy men would not save a sinner from God's judgment, although their love (for the sinful ones) is especially precious.³³ Like many miracle stories, this comment warned the faithful that the assistance of the saints should never be taken for granted. Despite all their merits, holy men and women would not be able to help the suppliants, regardless of case and vow. The aim of such stories was not to diminish the authority of the saints, but to recall their actual function as intercessors. At the same time, by listing such examples in the hagiographical material the authors avoided potential criticism of

³⁰ "Sæla guðs móður Mariam elskadi hann ok tilbað umfram alla heilaga menn", *GD*, ch. 8.

³¹ "Sæll Ambrosius byskup var honum harðla kærri" (Ch. 8).

³² *GD*, ch. 16.

³³ "Birtist fyrir þetta, at tign heilagra manna má eigi draga syndugan mann undan leyndum ok endaligum guðs dómi, þótt þeirra kærleikr birtist í fyrra stað fyrir augum heilagrar kristni" (*GD*, ch. 44).

idolatry: the saints had to be praised, but could never be portrayed as almighty.

Another issue must be mentioned in this context. The apparition of a saint in two different places at the same time is a perfect example of what Gregory of Tours presented as the saint's simultaneous living in two worlds, the heavenly and the earthly.³⁴ That principle might be applied to miraculous events in general, but it is especially well represented in this example of Guðmundr's simultaneous presence at Hof and Skálavík as well as its direct allusion to the episode from St. Ambrose's *vita*. Guðmundr's living in the heavenly and the earthly world was here revealed as an extraordinary ability and another "proof" for the communion of saints.

Scandinavian saints don't appear often in *Guðmundar sögur*. There is one story, however, that clearly demonstrates their importance for Guðmundr's saintly reputation. A woman (Rannveig*) lost consciousness for several hours on a Saturday before Lent; during that time she had an exceptional revelation.³⁵ Three saints, two Norwegian (Óláfr and Hallvarðr) and one Orkadian (Magnús) took her to heaven and showed her grand houses that belonged to various Icelanders considered holy men, both the ones who were dead and those who were still alive. As an example, Óláfr pointed at a house prepared for the priest Guðmundr Arason who, as all the deceased saints knew, could not be ranked lower than Thomas of Canterbury himself "because just as we support Norway and the Orkneys with our prayers, so does he support Iceland with his".³⁶

Óláfr Haraldsson is listed among the recipients of Guðmundr's greetings sent from Svínafell with the soul of the dying woman; otherwise he appears in one miracle story. A priest named Hrafn, worried about

³⁴ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 10.

³⁵ "[...] næsta laugardag fyrir dominicam Esto mihi in deum protectorem" (*GD*, ch. 4). Her name is not mentioned by Arngrímr, but the author of *GA* introduces the woman as Rannveig (chs. 58–60). *GB*, ch. 41 adds Apostle Peter as a patron of the local church: "þvi at þar var Petvrs kirkia aBervnesi iEastfiordvm", which might suggest that she lived there.

³⁶ "[...] ok svá sem vér fullting veitum Noregi ok Orkneyjum, svá mun hann hjálpa Ísland með sínum bænum" (*GA*, chs. 58–60; *GB*, ch. 41; *GD*, ch. 4). On visions see Peter Dinzelbacher, *Vision und Visionsliteratur im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1981), esp. pp. 29–56, and Jonas Wellendorf, *Kristelig Visionslitteratur i Norrøn Tradition*, an unpublished doctoral thesis submitted at the University of Bergen in 2007, esp. pp. 215–44.

the health of his (?) cow, made a vow to honour God and Guðmundr Arason, and explains his decision to Óláfr:

En veit ek þat, inn helgi Óláfr, at þu mátt þetta gera, ef þú vill, því at þú hefir mér bæði hjálpat á sjó ok landi, er ek hefi á þik kallat, en þenna farargreiða ætla ek Guðmundi byskupi með guði, en þó bið ek þik, at þú sér eigi í móti mér.³⁷

Why the supplicant decided to address St. Óláfr is difficult to assess. The fact that Guðmundr is preferred to this saint whose cult was so well established in Iceland, certainly adds prestige to the image of his saintliness. The appearance and intervention of the Scandinavian saints in Rannveig's* revelation is very important; the saints secure the "common opinion" about Guðmundr's holiness and their support for him. However, otherwise the Scandinavian holy men seem to be absent from the hagiography. Their absence might be attributed to the authorial tactics. Óláfr, Hallvarðr and Magnús were from the neighbouring areas, plus the Norwegian saints were also the representatives of the closely related kingdom that had incorporated Iceland before *Guðmundar sögur* were written down, which was perhaps not a meaningless fact.³⁸ Besides, a more intense popularisation of those figures in the narratives might have outshone Guðmundr's achievements; the popularity of Óláfr in medieval Iceland is undisputable.³⁹ At the same time, none of the three saints was a bishop and they were much earlier than Guðmundr, so the parallel of the models of sainthood was not as adequate as in the case of the foreign, widely recognized bishops mentioned above.

It is quite interesting that the interaction with the two Icelandic saints at whose translations Guðmundr assisted as priest took place only through dreams and relics during Guðmundr's life. None of the authors who wrote about Guðmundr Arason drew any direct parallels between his life and theirs. An interesting example of "friendship" between Guðmundr and St Þorlákr is to be found in *Jóns saga*.

³⁷ "But I know, Saint Óláfr, that you may do that if you want to, as you have helped me both on the sea and on land when I called on you, but this payment I shall offer to Bishop Guðmundr [who is] with God, and I am asking you not to bear a grudge against me". (*GJtb*, ch. 30 and *GB* ch. 144a). The author (authors) don't mention the reason for the man's particular devotion to this saint and it can only be deduced from this pronouncement.

³⁸ Except for *GP* that mentions the Svínafell story.

³⁹ Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, pp. 138–44.

Chapter 63 describes an appearance of St. Þorlákr to a poor woman named Þorfinna at Hofi in Svarfaðardalur. The deceased bishop asked her to take the message concerning her healing to “his brother Bishop Brandr and his friend, priest Guðmundr Arason”.⁴⁰ In this complex vision Þorlákr appeared to the woman after the Virgin Mary and St. Martin.⁴¹ The fact that Þorákr calls Brandr his “brother”, seems to be a reference to the fact that they were both bishops in Iceland at more or less the same time, for nearly two decades.⁴²

Guðmundr’s posthumous miracles are richer in stories in which the Icelandic holy prelates are compared to one another or co-operating with one another. When Þorsteinn from Hlýskógur prayed for his sick cow, he said, “Svá sem þú, Jón byskup, gafst líf kú Guðmundar prests í Flatey með skjótum atburð, svá gefðu, Guðmundr byskup, þessari kú líf ok fulla heilsu”.⁴³ Another man, Jón Steinólfsson, called on both holy prelates from Hólar when he was suffering from a pain in his eyes.⁴⁴ In the material concerning Jón of Hólar, the co-operation between Jón and Þorlákr is frequently underlined, like in the case when Jón appeared to a man in order to instruct him in the kind of prayers he and Þorlákr liked most.⁴⁵ The story about Þorný and her mysterious pregnancy contains an interesting passage concerning Þorlákr; although the woman made numerous vows and called upon both the Virgin Mary and St. Þorlákr on their feasts (23 December and 2 February), not

⁴⁰ “En þú far ok [seg] þessa alla hluti bróður mínum, Brandi byskupi, ok vin mínum, Guðmundi presti Arasyni” (*JS*, p. 302). The fact that a miracle story featuring St. Þorlákr as the miracle worker became incorporated into *Jóns saga* is interesting and rather surprising, not least because Jón is not even mentioned.

⁴¹ St. Martin is most probably mentioned in this context because some of his relics were reportedly kept at Hólar (*JS*, ch. 10).

⁴² Brandr was the bishop of Hólar in the years 1164–1201, and Þorlákr was the bishop of Skálholt in the years 1178–1193, and both had (to some extent) the support of the Oddaverjar family at the beginning of their Episcopal careers (Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland* 2000: 151–3). Certain cooperation between them must have taken place. Nevertheless, the friendship between the two bishops is never explicitly formulated in the text of the saga.

⁴³ “Just like you, Bishop Jón, swiftly gave life to the cow which belonged to Priest Jón from Flatey, so should you, Bishop Guðmundr, revive this cow and heal it” (*Gjtb*, ch. 33 and *GB*, ch. 144g). Þorsteinn’s special devotion to Jón is not referred to anywhere, so the argument is difficult to understand, I have not found a miracle in the extant material concerning Jón that might correspond with this example.

⁴⁴ *Gjtb*, ch. 35 and *GB* ch. 145b.

⁴⁵ “En þú hyggt at því vandliga er ek mun segja þér, ok seg öðrum mönnum at þar er menn heita bænahaldi til minna þakka, þá er mér þat þagast alt er af fimtígr eða fimtán tigr. Slíkt sama líkar ok beztt inum heilaga Þorláki byskupi” (*JS*, ch. 42).

only was there no relief, but her condition actually worsened.⁴⁶ Saints' aid could not be taken for granted, and Guðmundr's co-operation with them did not always rely on fixed rules. Þorný was not an exception; when a man called Pétr Bjarnarson from Hornafjörður fell ill, he called on Guðmundr Arason because he had not received help from other saints, although he had called on them.⁴⁷ The effect was a gradual improvement from that day on. The narratives about St. Jón and Þorlákr do not lack similar stories. A man named Áslákr suffered from a severe skin disease.⁴⁸ The night after "Þorlákr's water" had been applied all over his body, he awoke in pain and found out that now his face was also touched by the disease. Only after he made a vow to Jón was his body completely healed. Since Áslákr's face was still swollen, it was washed with "Þorlákr's water" and this time the relic did not cause any harm. One of Jón's miracle stories reports the healing of a deaf man who initially called on Þorlákr to heal his right ear and on Jón to heal his left ear. The man vowed to say *pater noster* on both saints' feasts but on the day of Jón's *elevatio* (*translatio*) which took place shortly afterwards he regained his hearing in both ears.⁴⁹ The rule which authors follow is rather "the rule of the story" instead of "the rule of the calendar": the right person to call on is the main character, regardless of the time of the year or any other principle.

Guðmundr's hagiographers have succeeded in presenting him on an equal footing with other saints, many of them well known and officially canonized. By doing this they demonstrated that his saintliness was on the same level and that he was worth the same honour. Guðmundr's saintliness has been presented as one that developed thanks to the support of other saints, but also as one that simply was predestined to flourish because of its likeness to the well known patterns. Many pious and holy prelates have been mentioned in the discussion of Guðmundr's achievements and merits, for instance Paulinus of Nola (c. 352–431) while discussing the importance of almsgiving.⁵⁰ Of other renowned saints Guðmundr is frequently compared to Martin, Benedict, Gregory and Dunstan, especially in *GD*.⁵¹ Arngrímur refers to Sulpicius Severus's

⁴⁶ "ok þótti henni þyngja við sitt heitt" (*GD*, ch. 80).

⁴⁷ "Hafði hann áðr heitit mörgu, ok stoðaði ekki" (*GJtb*, ch. 34 and *GB* ch. 144i, the miracle is dated to 1316).

⁴⁸ *JS*, ch. 21.

⁴⁹ *JS*, ch. 64b.

⁵⁰ *GD*, ch. 26.

⁵¹ *GD*, ch. 19.

writings about Martin or Gregory the Great's narratives about Benedict while he discusses Guðmundr's kindness towards his opponents.⁵² The presence of Benedict and Dunstan has a particular significance for the authors of Guðmundr's *vitae*, as at least two of them, including Arngrímr, the author of *GD*, were Benedictine monks.⁵³ For instance, the saint's dream that "warned" him about the episcopal election and its consequences has been used by Arngrímr in order to draw parallels between Dunstan and Guðmundr.⁵⁴ St. Dunstan was the archbishop of Canterbury, the place famous for Thomas Becket's martyrdom. The parallel is an allusion to Guðmundr's future struggles and the image of him being the Icelandic Thomas Becket was, as mentioned above, especially favoured by Arngrímr.⁵⁵ It must, however, be noted that all these examples are convincing comparisons and not pronouncements of any special bond between Guðmundr and those particular saints, similar to that between him and the Virgin Mary. The motif of "friendship" has otherwise only been used in reference to St. Ambrose (which puts Guðmundr in a superior position to other bishops compared in the narratives to Ambrose, for instance Árne Þorláksson), but not developed further.⁵⁶

6.2. *The presence and role of women*

From the earliest days of Guðmundr's priesthood there were signs that suggested his special vocation. Although the recipients of such signs were both men and women, the female participation in the testimonies concerning his sainthood is worth a closer look. During a service at Miklabær a woman named Hallfríðr Ófeigsdóttir saw a flame coming from Guðmundr's mouth.⁵⁷ Another day Halldóra, a woman introduced as "fórsystir Guðmundar prests" saw a beam of

⁵² *GD*, ch. 12.

⁵³ *Dunstanus saga* was composed by the priest and monk Árne Lárentiusson (born 1304), the son of Bishop Lárentius of Hólar. Benedict was the patron of Munkaþverá, Martin of a number of churches in the Hólar diocese (Grenjaðarstaður, Hof, Goðdalir, Möðruvellir in Eyjafjörður), and the Hólar cathedral supposedly owned his relics (Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, pp. 84–5 and 94).

⁵⁴ *GD*, ch. 19.

⁵⁵ *GD*, ch. 27. The references to Thomas Becket are more frequent, also in chs. 36 and 53.

⁵⁶ *Árna saga*, chs. 13 and 145.

⁵⁷ *GP* ch. 14; *GA* ch. 30; *GB* ch. 28; *GD* ch. 7.

light over Guðmundr as he was singing mass at Saurbær.⁵⁸ Such signs were perceived as demonstrations of divine grace; the confirmation of Guðmundr's holiness and a prelude to more impressive miraculous events.

Beside short apparitions quite a few women received visionary dreams which could be considered testimonies to Guðmundr's holiness and the fact that he had intercessors in heaven who granted him their full support. After an unfortunate trip to Hólar in a snowstorm a woman named Jódís introduced as Guðmundr's *fóstra* (which could be translated as "foster mother"/"foster daughter") had a visionary dream. She saw a boy named Gestr who had lost his life in the storm and who had just been buried by Guðmundr.⁵⁹ The boy explained to the woman that his death should not be mourned. Guðmundr's wish had been that Gestr should live with God and the wish was granted. Thus, Jódís was told to assure the priest that he had allies in heaven: Gestr and his brother Vémundr, and that he would be able to address them whenever he needed. Jódís told the priest her dream as soon as he woke up and he was very grateful for that message. The author of *GA* mentions also that before that happened, Guðmundr himself had a dream in which he seemed to perform a service and sing *Te igitur*.⁶⁰ Another woman, named Arnþrúðr, sat by his bed and was able to confirm that the priest indeed spoke in his sleep. Interestingly enough, *Ambrosius saga* contains a similar story: the bishop fell asleep during a service and when the Emperor Arcadius dared wake him up, he was severely reprimanded. Ambrose had learnt about "his brother, Bishop Martin's" death and was at the funerary service. By waking him up, the emperor interrupted the last song/prayer.⁶¹

The authors of both the thirteenth and fourteenth-century sources have listed many impressive examples of incidents where deceased saints revealed their respect and support for Guðmundr during the

⁵⁸ *GA* ch. 78; *GB* ch. 52; *GD* ch. 7. The word *fórsystir* is problematic to interpret; a *fóstrsystir* might be the intended term.

⁵⁹ *GA*, ch. 36.

⁶⁰ "Te igitur (clementissime Pater)" translated as "Thee therefore (most merciful Father)", is the first prayer of the Roman Catholic Mass. It begins the fourth part of the Holy Mass, and the second part of the Mass of the Faithful, and is sung before the consecration of the bread. "Te igitur (clementissime Pater)" translated as "Thee therefore (most merciful Father)", is the first prayer of the Roman Catholic Mass.

⁶¹ Ch. 17. *Martinus saga* repeats the event in ch. 58. The term *brother* is used here in a similar way as in the example concerning Brandr and Þorlákr (see 6.1. above). Both Ambrose and Martin were bishops in the second half of the fourth century.

period of his priesthood. In each case the recipients of this kind of testimony are female, and the saint most often referred to is the Virgin Mary. At the beginning of his priestly career, a certain woman who lived at Flatey became insane and all efforts to help her proved to be in vain.⁶² One night, the Virgin Mary came in a dream to another woman, who was sitting by the bed of the sick one. The Mother of Christ gave her advice about the right medicine that should be used in that case: “Take water consecrated by priest Guðmundr Arason, my friend, because I find his blessing the most powerful”.⁶³

A revelation experienced by Úlfrún,⁶⁴ an anchoress living at the Benedictine abbey of Þingeyrar, marks the end of Guðmundr’s priestly career in a significant way and is another testimony of the Virgin Mary’s support for him.⁶⁵ Having been chosen as bishop by the chieftains of the Northern quarter, the saint hesitated over accepting the proposal. What is more, he was reluctant (even negative), being aware of Kolbeinn Tumason’s intentions: the control of the see of Hólar. It is not said explicitly how the meeting between the woman and bishop-elect had been arranged or whether it was spontaneous; it is only clear that he was visiting the monastery of Þingeyrar that day. Úlfrún informed Guðmundr that Mary, the Mother of God, wished him to give the chieftains a positive answer.⁶⁶ He decided to follow her advice, perhaps because it was yet another persuasive appeal, and perhaps because the saint put more trust in it than he did in the arguments of the chieftains. The passage is another example of Guðmundr’s encounter with an anchoress. Like Ketilbjörg, over whose grave he once had given a memorable sermon, Úlfrún seems to have enjoyed a certain respect among male clergy.⁶⁷ Even though medieval

⁶² GA, ch. 35; GB, ch. 31; GD, ch. 9.

⁶³ “Late þer sækja uatn G(uðmundar) prestz ins goða uinar mins. þuiat mer þickir hann bezt uigia uatnit. ok man við þat batna” (GA, ch. 35; GB, ch. 31; GD, ch. 9).

⁶⁴ Her name is not noted by Arngrímr (GD, ch. 22), as in the case of Rannveig*, but known from GP, ch. 27, GA, ch. 107 and GB, ch. 71. She is mentioned in one more source, *ÞJtb* II, chs. 149–70.

⁶⁵ The narratives use both words *nunna* and *einsetukona* about her. Anchoresses lived alone close to some type of dwelling, e.g. church. Úlfrún, who lived in the vicinity of the Þingeyrar monastery, was such an anchoress, (Lat.) *reclusa*, Arngrímr mentions the little house by the monastery where she lived.

⁶⁶ “Hon segir biskups-efni sva, at Maria hafði þat vitrat henne, at guð ok hon villði, at hann væri biskup” (GP, ch. 27; GA, ch. 107; GB, ch. 71). In GD, ch. 22, the statement is put in direct speech, “vili guðs er ráðinn, at gera þik biskup sinnar kristni, svá sem ek nam af munni sjálfrar minnar frú, guðs móður”.

⁶⁷ See 3.4. above.

Icelandic sources rarely mention *reclusae*, those women are presented as authorities, even though their active participation in ecclesiastical life was minimal. In Iceland two nunneries existed in the Middle Ages: one in the South at Kirkjubær (1186–1551) and one in the North at Reynistaður (1296–1551). The encounter of Úlfrún and Guðmundr supposedly took place in 1202 and was first recorded in a source dated to the 1240s. It may, therefore, be assumed that for an Icelandic woman seeking spiritual life in seclusion Kirkjubær was the only option at the time. However, since the nunnery was relatively new and Þingeyrar, the oldest Icelandic monastery, already had the reputation as a more or less established community, Úlfrún's, or rather, the authorial preference seems to be justified.⁶⁸ Þingeyrar was situated in the northern quarter and had possibly been supported by the influential families from that part of the country.

As far as the future conflicts with chieftains are concerned, an extraordinary incident involving a woman throws an even sharper light on the future relationship between Guðmundr and Kolbeinn. Of a few healing miracles, one performed for Gyðríðr Þorvarðsdóttir, Guðmundr's cousin and Kolbeinn Tumason's wife, is an exceptional story. Included for the first time in *GB*, it is a tale of not as much a physical but a spiritual healing of the woman. Gyðríðr's sudden and mysterious disappearance and her condition afterwards have been used as an excuse to discuss relationship between the two men. It provoked Kolbeinn's declaration of his faithfulness to the Church in the years to come. Guðmundr's kindness and mercy towards the chieftain contrasts with Kolbeinn's later enmity towards the saint during the period of his episcopacy.

Gyðríðr acted as a mediatrix between her husband and Guðmundr twice. Two sources, *GB* and *GD*, quote her conversation with Guðmundr which took place shortly after the excommunication of Kolbeinn at Hegranesþing.⁶⁹ The woman apologized for her husband's attitude towards the bishop and expressed her worries about the salvation of her husband's soul. Hence, she asked Guðmundr whether the

⁶⁸ Little is known about the development of monasteries in Iceland; some sources date the foundation of Þingeyrar to 1112, and some to 1133/34. It is possible that Þingeyrar was beginning to be considered the centre of literary activity already in the end of the twelfth century, though it is only a hypothesis. For a discussion of the origins of the religious houses in Iceland see Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland* 2000, pp. 133–43.

⁶⁹ *GB*, ch. 90; *GD*, ch. 30.

poem praising the Virgin Mary that had been composed by Kolbeinn might appeal to the Mother of God so that she would not allow him be doomed to hell. The role of the Virgin as a redemptrix and as an intermediary is of special significance here, since Guðmundr Arason and Kolbeinn Tumason were well known as her devotees. The bishop's positive reply must have appeared consoling to Gyðríðr, though the context would suggest that the Virgin Mary would intervene when the need of her help would be greatest.⁷⁰

The typology of women and men as recipients of signs and dreams in the narratives concerning Guðmundr Arason is rather typical for medieval narratives and presents women more often in a domestic context or a kind of seclusion, while men are both socially and politically active. However, it would be wrong to assume that women as recipients of religious messages are passive. Gyðríðr, Rannveig* and Úlfrún could support the theory. Gyðríðr and Rannveig's* physical condition confined them to one specific spot (in case of Gyðríðr's possession the message was of a different kind: indirect and not verbalized by her), and Úlfrún who lived in seclusion for religious reasons, had also been visited by other people as she probably never left her place. Otherwise, all the other women presented as witnesses to Guðmundr's holiness either approached him in order to deliver the message, or other people, most probably clergymen, who were able to take it further or record it.⁷¹ Still, men of lower social standing who witnessed signs or apparitions had to undergo the same procedure, unlike Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson or Kolbeinn Tumason who were powerful chieftains. However, in their case another problem arises; their dreams and premonitions concerning Guðmundr's holiness might be questioned when delivered in time of struggle with Guðmundr. Men of lower standing, for instance farmer Má Finnbogason who during a service saw a bird appear on Guðmundr's shoulder and then disappear

⁷⁰ "Sannliga frændi, mun hún ambuna [...] Þar sem málskiptin ok hjálpin liggir við" (*GD*, ch. 30). In *GB*, ch. 90, however, Guðmundr's final answer is: "Gvd mvn sia til med oss ok verdi sem hann vill". However, when Kolbeinn is dying, the bishop reportedly said to him, "Nv mvn Maria lavna þer kvæði þin ok helgir menn Gvds er þv hefir ortt vm. enda þarf þv nv mest".

⁷¹ The insane woman from Flatey must have been confined to bed as well, or at least kept at home, but her female companion took care of the distribution of the message.

in the air, were most probably in no better social position as an authority than women who witnessed signs.⁷²

It is quite true, on the other hand, that the very fact that women rarely recorded such messages themselves and that their pursuit of a career in the Church took a different way than that of men, makes their participation in religious life more passive. Medieval accounts of women who delivered prophetic messages or even preached were known all across Europe mainly from texts composed by heretic sects such as Cathars or Waldensians, and works which argued against them. The Gregorian Reform had limited women's opportunity to take official religious functions. The fact that women were not supposed to discuss theological matters in public resulted in a number of records of their participation in incidents of a private context. The new type of activity provided them with a certain authority. However, that new trend did not entirely challenge the belief that women were intellectually inferior; their ability to speak about divine matters was usually attributed to the gift of prophecy rather than to intelligence. Many women chose life in seclusion, which gave them the opportunity to cultivate their piety at some distance from the ties of the society. As mentioned above, *reclusae* often enjoyed a certain esteem, and Úlfrún, presented above, could be a good example in this context. Úlfrún, a woman respected for her piety and as a recipient of a message from the Virgin Mary about the future bishop of Hólar and a holy man, could not have been located at a better place than Þingeyrar. In the turbulent religious and political climate of medieval Europe, prophecy offered women a rare opportunity for direct involvement in the political sphere.⁷³ The example of Úlfrún shows that Iceland was no exception to this rule.

Guðmundr interacted with a lot of women during his priesthood. Those women had various social backgrounds and the context of their meetings with the priest varied. On the basis of those examples it is relatively easy to notice how Guðmundr's kindness and goodness was underlined by all his hagiographers. His teachings would not frighten the faithful, and his approach towards people is clearly modelled according to the *imitatio Christi* ideal. Such conduct certainly made

⁷² GP ch. 14; GA ch. 30; GB ch. 28; GD ch. 7.

⁷³ Diane Watt, *Secretaries of God. Women Prophets in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer 1997), p. 23.

him different from Jón or Þorlákr, and more approachable, although kindness and goodness was listed by their hagiographers among the virtues of all holy bishops.⁷⁴ He was neither an ascetic reformer like Þorlákr, nor did he interfere with the lives of average people in the way Jón did, by forbidding games, dances, and love poetry, which Guðmundr's predecessor at Hólar considered the remnants of heathenism.

Having respectable relatives placed Guðmundr among other leading saga characters, but the fact that he was born out of wedlock was not meaningless for the shaping of the image of his holiness. It might have influenced the depiction of his relationships with women, which are far more numerous and complex than those recorded in the narratives about Þorlákr and Jón. Jón was married twice, and Þorlákr, the model ascetic, was strongly advised against marriage by an apparition that visited him in a dream. Although we find examples of positive contact with women in *Jóns saga* (even if on purely religious grounds, like with the recluse named Híldr), both of Guðmundr's saintly counterparts seem to have been far stricter in matters of morality and male-female relationships. Thus, their contact with women as recorded by the narratives is much more limited.

Arngrímur Brandsson's variant reveals a much more conservative attitude towards morality than other authors of *Guðmundar sögur*. He decided to omit the information of Guðmundr's illegitimate birth and only mentioned the saint's parents by names. The relationship of Ari and Úlfheiðr is presented as a positive one in *GP*, *GA* and *GB*, but barely referred to in *GD*. The authors of younger versions depict both his mother and father in a very positive way. The question of "chastity" is a separate problem whose analysis shows considerable differences among hagiographers.⁷⁵ Although none of the variants presents any controversial or very liberal attitudes towards women in general or male-female relationships, certain differences between *GD* and the other variants are worth noting. Arngrímur wrote that Guðmundr "neither knew nor had a woman", which was supposed to guarantee that the protagonist deserved the status of a saint, as a man who had lived his life in chastity.⁷⁶ While all variants depict the anchoress Úlfrún as

⁷⁴ Hunt, *A Study of Authorial Perspective*, p. 231.

⁷⁵ Skórzewska, 'Female assistance in holiness', pp. 207–9.

⁷⁶ "[...] ei um aldr var honum kona kend né eignuð" (*GD*, ch. 6). The word *kenna* refers to a close relationship in this context.

a deeply religious recluse who did not even want to meet her son, it is only Arngrím's text, *GD*, that mentions her refusal to see any men at all (male visitors, specifically: "engan karlmann").⁷⁷ Another interesting incident involving the "support" Guðmundr had from deceased saints and the mediation of women is worth mentioning in this context. During the trip to Norway, after Guðmundr had given his consent to the result of the election, an anonymous woman "saw" a male figure in episcopal vestments that approached the bishop-elect sleeping aboard and made the sign of the cross above him.⁷⁸ The apparition was interpreted as St. Jón of Hólar giving Guðmundr his approval and support. In *GD* a man, not a woman, is the recipient of the message. That particular variant also omits the participation of women in short visions from the beginnings of Guðmundr's career who witnessed the flame and the beam of light during Guðmundr's services.

For the female mystics of the thirteenth century, virginity was important in a new way: it was not seen as a woman's status in respect to males (non-married), but had the older connotations of independence and self-sufficiency.⁷⁹ The female visionary was celibate, which changed her status, moving her upward toward a position of potential authority. Female youth, if not virginal, was perceived as dangerous even in the context of pious celibacy. The authors of the sagas on Guðmundr Arason seem to have followed that pattern: both in *GP* and in *GD* Úlfrún is introduced as a middle-aged or, perhaps, even an elderly woman. She had a son who was already ordained a priest—a suitable background for someone who receives a valuable message from the Virgin Mary. The woman from Svínafell who was asked by Guðmundr to take his greetings to heaven is also referred to as "old",

⁷⁷ Her refusal to see the son, a priest, would show how deep Úlfrún's devotion to the life in seclusion and to religion was, but would also unite her with the Mother of Christ. The fact that she chose not to see her own child, the human being naturally closest to a mother, would enable her to participate in Mary's suffering after the crucifixion. The issue of motherhood and chastity in the *vita* of the recluse Juette of Huy, a contemporary of Úlfrún, was discussed in Jennifer Carpenter, 'Juette of Huy, Recluse and Mother (1158–1228): Children and Mothering in the Saintly Life', in *Power of the Weak. Studies on Medieval Women*, ed. by Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 57–93. Related aspects are also discussed by Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses. The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe*, trans. by Myra Heerspink Scholz (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

⁷⁸ *GP*, ch. 29; *GA*, ch. 113; *GB*, ch. 79; *GD*, ch. 22.

⁷⁹ E.A. Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1986), p. 34.

while the Flatey case barely mentions the participants in the event as “women”. The incident, however, differs from the other ones analysed here in its indirectness (Guðmundr is absent).

Úlfrún’s extreme seclusion and the refusal to see her own son might definitely be perceived as the authors’ conscious attempt to praise this kind of female spirituality, and a positive feature in both *GP* and *GD*. The denial of contact with any men and a chaste life would give Úlfrún an advantage over a number of lay and clerical leaders: she had devoted her life to religion and was rewarded for it both by Guðmundr’s respect and by the heavenly message about his being the right candidate for bishop. The fact that the message was delivered to the anchoress by the Virgin Mary has a threefold meaning in this context: first, Guðmundr was already very much devoted to her during the time of his priesthood; second, he had been elected the bishop of Hólar and the Virgin Mary was the patron saint of the cathedral church; third, Úlfrún was a woman pursuing the ideal the Mother of Christ represented. Neither *GP* nor *GD* mentions that Úlfrún insisted on seeing Guðmundr because she had a message for him. That might imply that the saintly priest had heard about the woman’s piety and therefore came to visit her, perhaps expecting some advice that would finally suggest what decision he should make.

As far as Rannveig* is concerned, her revelation is the first source for such a case in medieval Icelandic literature where a woman is blamed for illicit sexuality in the form of extra-marital relations with two priests.⁸⁰ Before she met the saints and saw heaven, she was taken to hell and threatened by two devils as a sinner because of the relationships and working on Sundays. It has been suggested by Margaret Cormack that the woman’s problem was her inappropriate choice of partners, rather than lust itself.⁸¹ Cormack suggests that the image of women as the originators of sexual misbehaviour was “difficult for Icelanders to accept”.⁸² Also, according to Carolyne Larrington, “as the vision develops, the issue of clerical concubinage, of relevance only to a limited number of women in the saga’s audience, modulates

⁸⁰ Jenny Jochens mentions the transfer of responsibility “for breaking sexual regulations from male to female, particularly those involving the clergy” (Jochens, ‘The Illicit Love Visit’, p. 384, see also Cormack, ‘Sagas of Saints’, p. 315).

⁸¹ Cormack, *Sagas of Saints*. See ft. 23 where Cormack translates *hórdómr* as “fornication, adultery”, not “lust”.

⁸² Cormack, *Sagas of Saints*, p. 315.

into analysis of female vanity and deliberate attempts at exciting male desire".⁸³ It is difficult to entirely agree with those statements, taking into consideration the whole corpus of extant medieval Icelandic literature, but they can certainly be applied in this particular context.

The hagiographers have expressed a certain disapproval of the woman's involvement with the clergy. It has been suggested that introducing certain patterns of correct behaviour and role models for women in the *vitae* imported from other European countries might have aimed at improving the Icelandic morality through women.⁸⁴ Stories that presented pious women, popularized promises of a reward in heaven for decent conduct on earth or a severe punishment in hell for sins such as an illicit relationship with a priest were supposed to change the behaviour of immoral clerics by influencing the women who lived with them.

It should not be surprising that Rannveig* was chosen to experience the mystical journey and carry the testimony of Guðmundr's holiness. Since during his priesthood the future bishop of Hólar was already passionately devoted to the Virgin Mary, Rannveig's* "improvement" would be almost certain. It is not known what consequences the vision had for her as neither *GD* nor any other saga reports what happened to Rannveig* afterwards. The context might imply that she altered her conduct and ended the relationships with the two priests for the respect of Guðmundr's holiness and the ideal womanhood represented by the Virgin. Moreover, by doing so Rannveig* would gain an ally in the battle against desires and temptations: Mary's intercessory powers determined by the Assumption and the Coronation provided her with the authority over the world, heaven and hell. The idea, present e.g. in Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* and well known in many countries in the thirteenth century Europe, must have been known by the Icelandic clergy as well, hence the context of Rannveig's* story.

⁸³ Larrington, 'Leizla Rannveigar', p. 238, with special reference to Guðmundr's life see p. 248. On concubinage in Iceland during the relevant period see e.g. Auður Magnúsdóttir, *Frillor og Fruar. Politik och samlevnad på Island 1120-1400* (Gothenburg: Historiska institutionen, 2001).

⁸⁴ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 'Om legender og samfunnspåvirkning', in *Norm og praksis i middelaldersamfunnet*, ed. by Else Mundal and Ingvild Øye, *Kulturstudier* 14, 184-197 (pp. 191-2). For the discussion of such issues as celibacy and sexuality in medieval Iceland see also Jochens, 'The Church and Sexuality', 'Consent in Marriage' and 'The Illicit Love Visit'.

It must be underlined that however the women themselves are portrayed, Guðmundr's approach towards them is always depicted as positive. Many parallels could be drawn between the portrayal of women in the sources concerning the saint and certain paragraphs from the life of Christ as depicted in the New Testament. The example that perhaps illustrates it best is that of a woman called Þuríðr, the beautiful mistress of Árne *rauðskegr*. They were together for a long time, despite Bishop Páll Jónsson's ban, and had many children. Having heard of the teachings of Guðmundr, however, Þuríðr ran away from Árne. Although none of the narratives mention the subject of the teachings, all of them note that the woman met Guðmundr on the Feast of St. Matthew (21 September 1200), and asked for his mercy. As a result, Árne never saw his mistress again; she became one of Guðmundr's followers "at all times thereafter, except when the hostility of others forced them to separate".⁸⁵ It is tempting to make a comparison between Þuríðr; the first individual ever mentioned as Guðmundr's follower, and Mary Magdalene, the exceptional "apostle of apostles" as many medieval thinkers claimed.⁸⁶ However, none of the sources about Guðmundr ever mention any of his teachings concerning morality or illicit relationships. The saint's attitude towards those issues is, actually, never mentioned and all the critical comments come either directly from the authors or are attributed to other characters that appear in the texts. In this context it is interesting to notice that all critical statements concerning Guðmundr's miracles or religion in general which are noted by the saga authors are uttered by men (including clergymen), and not women.

It is an interesting fact that the accounts of Guðmundr's episcopacy present women in a different light than those of his priesthood and their significance as witnesses to his holiness seems to be absent and not replaced by any other purpose. The majority of women appear in miracle stories, the context is usually domestic and the theme provision of food. Except for a few curative miracles,⁸⁷ the other cases in which female figures appear during his episcopacy are the demonic

⁸⁵ *GP*, ch. 19; *GA*, ch. 83; *GB*, ch. 57; *GD*, ch. 7.

⁸⁶ Darleen Pryds, 'Proclaiming Sanctity through Proscribed Arts: The Case of Rose of Viterbo', in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. by Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1998), 159–72.

⁸⁷ *GJtb*, ch. 21; *GD*, ch. 41.

attacks in Eiði and Selkolla's story. The suggestion of female sexuality as an evil force is present both in the depiction of the *flagð* from Eiði and especially Selkolla.

Other female figures who are mentioned by the source material during the years of Guðmundr's episcopacy are real women, the beneficiaries of miracles, usually of low status, but nevertheless significant in Guðmundr's biography. And quite a few of them are referred to as the saint's friends. One of them is Ingibjörg, introduced as "the sister of Helgi Lambkársson in Aðalvík", but whose father was in fact Abbot Lambkár Porgilsson, the author of *GP*.⁸⁸ Another one is a woman named Oddkatla from an unknown place (presumably somewhere in the North).⁸⁹ Arngrímr Brandsson added two stories where the recipients of miracles were anonymous female friends of the saint.⁹⁰ These friends offered their hospitality to Guðmundr during his episcopacy despite their limited resources and were always well rewarded for it. The poorer they were and the more they offered, the more they received in return, in accordance with the principles of Christian faith. The example of an anonymous woman living in the vicinity of Hólar, introduced as Guðmundr's female friend and compared by Arngrímr to the biblical Martha, is rather extraordinary. Guðmundr stayed in her house with a few followers and asked the woman one day whether their visit would not cost her too much. She answered that his gratitude and friendship were more valuable to her than the cattle which would be killed to feed all the guests. Guðmundr thanked her and promised to pray that she would never suffer a lack of means. The saga claims that the woman always gathered an exceptional amount of hay in her area and earned a good deal from selling it. Furthermore, sick people would rest in her house (literally, stay in the same bed in which Guðmundr had slept) and regain their health. Also, a lot of healings took place in the area where her house stood, by a stone that had been consecrated by the bishop.⁹¹

Guðmundr's female friends are by no means more privileged than his male friends, whether the special affection of the saint or a number

⁸⁸ See Genealogy 2. *GJtb*, ch. 26; *GB*, ch. 140; *GD*, ch. 65.

⁸⁹ *GJtb*, ch. 27; *GB*, ch. 141.

⁹⁰ Ch. 65.

⁹¹ "Svá ok fyrir þann stein, er biskupinn hafði vígt henni, urðu margar heilsubætr" (*GD*, ch. 68). Also Oddkatla was supposed to have had especially fruitful harvest thanks to her faith in Guðmundr's consecrations (*GJtb* ch. 27, *GB* ch. 141).

of miraculous events is concerned. Nothing indicates that any of the individuals referred to as Guðmundr's friend benefit from this particular relationship with the saint in any way. Male or female friends are no more pious than other people mentioned by the sources either. The piety of the women, however, does have a slightly different character than that of men, which is related to their social and textual conventions. As far as other aspects are concerned, no woman seems to have been a regular member of any of Guðmundr's "following" or have had any romantic or other type of close relationship to him. An exception here could be Þuríðr, the former mistress of Árni *rauðskeggr*, but it is uncertain for how many years she followed Guðmundr; none of the younger sources lists her in the bishop's following. Otherwise the women are either introduced as widows, good housewives, wives, "poor women", or, simply, "women". In general, the presence of young women available for marriage or more independent women of high social status is virtually non-existent in the lives of the holy Icelandic bishops, including Guðmundr. In his case the difference between the years of priesthood and episcopacy as far as the presence and role of women is concerned, seems particularly sharp.

A closer look at other medieval Icelandic holy prelates underlines the difference between them and Guðmundr. Jón Ögmundarson's two marriages have been presented as an obstacle to his consecration for the bishop of Hólar.⁹² The women who are mentioned in the passages referring to Jón's episcopacy are Ingunn who was one of the teachers at the cathedral school and a woman who came to Hólar to beg for food.⁹³ Ingunn, described as an excellent scholar, certainly contributed to the prestigious image of Jón's cathedral school and the story about the poor woman is, in fact, a story about a miraculous multiplication of food. Ingunn's presence might only be outshone by Hildr, the anchoress and nun who was so close to Bishop Jón that he wished to be buried close to the place of her seclusion.⁹⁴ Hildr's piety and wisdom is praised in several miracle stories, and the wisdom of her

⁹² Jón had to obtain permission from the pope as the archbishop refused to perform the consecration (*JS*, ch. 7).

⁹³ For Ingunn see *JS*, ch. 8A and for the poor woman *JS*, ch. 18. Ingunn's mother, Guðrún Daðadóttir (Starkaðarsonar, of Svinfellingar, see *BpS*, p. 220, ft. 1), is also introduced as a *vittr kona* in *JS*, ch. 20B.

⁹⁴ *JS*, ch. 20b. Hildr is present in rather a lot of passages of *Jóns saga* (*JS*, chs. 20b–20f).

teachings is underlined.⁹⁵ As far as Þorlákr is concerned, the absence of women in his surroundings is much more evident than it is in the case of Guðmundr or Jón. From the beginnings of his ecclesiastical career, the image of him as a holy bishop was centred on asceticism and chastity, as demonstrated in the previous chapter and the only encounters with women are those in posthumous miracle stories.

Episcopacy meant much greater responsibilities towards the faithful than priesthood. This was the position with which the authors of the sagas about the holy bishops, as well as of those about other Icelandic prelates, were mostly preoccupied. Thus, since episcopacy defined the image of the protagonists, it had to be as close to perfection as possible. Perhaps therefore the life conduct of the protagonists, even those who had been married, was portrayed as free of any close relationships with women who were potentially available as sexual partners. Although it is not a predominant or much discussed issue in the bishops' sagas, chastity seems to be a preferred option and the role of women in general, and their participation in the bishops' lives, diminished. In Guðmundr's case another explanation is also possible: the visionary statements about his holy episcopal future were fulfilled during the years of the episcopacy. His miraculous abilities grew in number and the ability to make the right decisions or predict events made Guðmundr independent of any adversaries. Furthermore, the presence of the Virgin Mary in the bishop's life, her interventions and direct "contact" with the saint compensates in all the narratives for the absence of female individuals.

⁹⁵ *JS*, ch. 20f. The saga claims that she used to teach "well-mannered women" ("siðlátar konur") and fostered a boy named Þórólfr whom she also taught.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“THE FATHER OF THE POOR”?

Was the saint constantly followed by an uncontrollable hungry mob as certain passages in the sagas suggest? The image of Guðmundr Arason as that of a clergyman spending all his income on people in need of food is well known. Gunnar F. Guðmundsson has devoted a whole article to Guðmundr’s image as “the father of the poor”.¹ Ólafur Lárusson has noted that the bishop was the friend of the poor and allowed anyone who came to him to join his following.² Stefán Karlsson writes, “on these journeys he gathered disciples of whom it is said, in language reminiscent of the Bible, that they ‘létu frændr sína ok vini ok girntuz at fylgja honum’”.³ Besides colourful descriptions of problems caused by beggars and vagrants, the narratives also provide a number of names, and the identity as well as the social status of Guðmundr’s followers (at least some of them) can be estimated. Another question that needs to be asked is what kind of circumstances made the concept of Guðmundr as “the father of the poor” a crucial aspect of his saintliness. The historical and archaeological data that is currently available might help in answering the question why harsh living conditions in the fourteenth century created a need for such a saint.

7.1. *“By now he had a large following”*

7.1.1. *The respectable*

It is not possible to establish a definition of Guðmundr’s following as a steady group of some specific individuals since the descriptions of the bishop’s followers differ not only from source to source but depend on the context. First of all, it should be kept in mind that there must have

¹ Gunnar F. Guðmundsson, ‘Guðmundur Arason: biskup fátækra?’, *Merki Krossins* (2001), 20–6.

² Ólafur Lárusson, ‘Guðmundur góði í þjóðtrú Íslendinga’ p. 113.

³ Stefán Karlsson, ‘Guðmundar sögur biskups’, p. 154.

been two major types of group that followed Guðmundr: a more or less regular entourage, and a spontaneous group whose members were not obliged to keep him company, but decided themselves to do that for various reasons. The aim of each journey (visitation, confrontation with the bishop's opponents) and various authorial concepts seem to have determined the number and type of people who assisted him. The authors hardly ever mention Guðmundr's decisions and commands as far as the assistance of particular people is concerned. Nor do they give any detailed description of any specific retinue the bishop had at his disposal at the time. It might be possible that someone else was in charge of the arrangement of the group that would assist him during a journey, particularly if an official meeting or a confrontation was the goal.

Another alternative is that "the followers" decided for themselves that they would follow the bishop, which could be the case of spontaneous visits. At the beginning of Guðmundr's priestly career, *GP* mentions only him in references to different journeys: "he was invited", "he went", etc., though that might only reflect the authorial focus on Guðmundr. On the occasion of visiting Jón Brandsson in Steingrímsfjörður in the autumn 1200 the source says that "by now he had a large following".⁴ After that event, some passages note not only Guðmundr, but also his *föruneyti* (entourage) or "them".⁵ In a few cases at least a few members of the group are listed. For example, *GA* and *GB* describe Guðmundr's journey to Hólar in order to visit bishop Brandr "and other friends", together with the following people:

- Helgi *bóndi* from Skeið
- priest Erlendr Brandsson⁶

⁴ *GP* ch. 19; *GA* ch. 83; *GB* ch. 34. In *GD* the story is omitted, but Arngrímur describes an identical event, without mentioning personal or place names, in *GD* ch. 65 dating it to the period of Guðmundr's episcopacy (see Appendix 2.).

⁵ *GP*, chs. 20 (crossing the river at Lómagnúpr) and 23 (at Stafafell, where the news of Brandr Sæmundarson's death reached Guðmundr). The passages describing the days shortly before the episcopal election and right after it (*GP*, chs. 21–9 and *GA*, chs. 90–9) used different descriptions in the same context without always mentioning that somebody has joined Guðmundr or abandoned him. Thus, it must be assumed that a certain entourage assisted him all the time (see, e.g., *GP*, ch. 23). It must have been a custom since many sagas about the Icelandic bishops refer to some kind of following in the context of lengthy journeys, e.g. in *Jóns saga* a *föruneyti* is mentioned, but never specified (e.g. in *JS*, ch. 7).

⁶ *DI* I, 76.

- Bjarni Jónsson (called Söng-Bjarni)
- a man named Sigmundur
- Klængr Þorsteinsson⁷
- a woman named Helga who lived at Gröf/Vellir
- Helga’s son, Ingjaldr
- a girl named Dýrhildr
- a woman named Una Herleifsdóttir⁸
- a man named Hrafnkell Skeggjason and his wife Hallbera⁹

The sources mention also the presence of foster children “*fóstrar* hans [Guðmundr’s]”, and students (*lærisveinar*), whom Guðmundr loved like his own sons.¹⁰ That statement explains also the use of the word *fóstrar* which might both refer to foster parents or foster children. It might mean that the bishop’s students were also in a way his foster sons. The individuals listed here are: Gestr, the son of Snorri *assabani*, a sub deacon, and Vermundr, the son of Þorgrímr from Brattavellir. However, there is also a reference to a woman named Jódís Bersadóttir later in the text. The context makes it difficult to decide whether she was a foster daughter or a foster mother, and whether she was related to Vermundr or Guðmundr.¹¹ It is worth noting that Jódís appears elsewhere, referred to as Guðmundr’s *fóstra*, and is a recipient of a message for Guðmundr. That message comes from Vermundr and

⁷ Sigmundur og Klængr. S(ynir) Þorst(eins) Runólfs s(onar) (*GB*, ch. 35).

⁸ *GB*: Hiorleifsdóttir.

⁹ *GA*, ch. 41 and *GB*, ch. 35. In *GD*, ch. 16, only the students, Gestr and Vermundr, are listed. Otherwise, the author states, “eru með honum í ferð bæði ungir menn ok gamlir, þótt fáir sé nefndir”.

¹⁰ *GA* ch. 41: “Þar vǫru ok í för fostrar hans ok lærisveinar [...] Unni hann þeim svá mikit sem þeir væri hans synir”, *GB* ch. 35. says, “Þar *voro ok <i> for keNslv saeinar hans [...] Hann vnni þeim sva mikit sem þeir væri hans s(ynir)”, *GD* ch. 16 contains a very short description of the following: “Eru með honum í ferð bæði ungir menn ok gamlir, þótt fáir sé nefndir. Klerkar hans vóru þar tveir, *Hospes* (þ.e. Gestr) ok Vermundr, er hann unni sem lífi sínu. Fóstrmóðir hans var ok þar ok ein meyja lítil”. Thus, since in *GA* both *fostrar* and *lærisveinar* are put together in this context, it might suggest that Guðmundr’s students were also his foster sons. However, the following sentences seem to explain that the author referred to the woman named Jódís in this context. The way Guðmundr’s students are introduced in *GB* and *GD* also supports this argument.

¹¹ The author of *GA* mentions “fostra hans er Jodis het” while Arngrímr mentions “fóstrmóðir”. The context is as follows: “Gestr hét sveinn, sonr Snorra assabana [...] Annarr hét Vermundr, sonr Þorgríms af Brattavelli. Unni hann þeim svá mikit sem þeir væri hans synir Þar var ok í för með honum fóstra hans, er Jódís hét”.

Gestr who have been taken to heaven after death, and who assure the saint of their support.¹²

Thus, this particular description includes a large variety of people, but none of them has been introduced in the source material as connected with any influential Icelandic family or any significant individual other than Guðmundr. While travelling around the country in the summer 1201 Guðmundr was joined by other *prestlingar*, that is: young men training to be priests.¹³ The following men are listed: Snorri Bárðarson, Guðmundr's relative and the son of priest Bárðr Snorrason, "er lengi var með honum síðan".¹⁴ There was also Páll, the son of priest Ingjaldr and Lambkár, the son of priest Þorgils Gunnsteinsson, who also accompanied the bishop for a long time. Lambkár and Snorri are indeed mentioned quite a few times after that event. Already as a bishop-elect, Guðmundr travelled with his three deacons: Sturla Bárðarson, Lambkár Þorgilsson and Þorlákr Þorsteinsson, and was later joined by Snorri Bárðarson, Grímr Hjaltason, Grímr *gáli*, Jón Álason and "reiðslumaðr þeira".¹⁵ It is uncertain, though, whether all the men listed or just the deacons should count as Guðmundr's following here. The journey took place shortly after Guðmundr was informed that he had been elected bishop of Hólar. The purpose was most probably a visit to the priest Eyjólf Hallsson in order to discuss with him the decision taken by the chieftains.¹⁶

It is noticeable that the number of historically significant individuals in Guðmundr's following grew as the consecration approached. As in many other aspects, also in this one the fourteenth-century variants contain more detailed information. The description of Guðmundr's consecration journey to Norway is rather extensive in all the younger variants. For instance, *GA* states, "Þar ráðast til ferðar með þeim fimmtán íslenzkir menn" ("fifteen Icelanders travelled with them"), and

¹² *GA*, ch. 36. See 6.2. above.

¹³ *GA*, ch. 83, "Þa reðuz um sumarit til hans prestlingar". *GB*, ch. 57 mentions the same names as *GA*, but introduced in a different way: "Þa reðvz til hans vm sumarit klerkar iij."

¹⁴ "who was with him for a long time since then". It is the younger Snorri Bárðarson (Genealogy 24., *Seldælir*). His grandmother was Ingibjörg Þorgeirsdóttir, Guðmundr's aunt.

¹⁵ *GA*, ch. 97. *GP*, ch. 24 mentions only Sturla Bárðarson and Lambkár Þorgilsson.

¹⁶ Hardly any information is available in the extant source material about that particular priest. It is unclear why Guðmundr decided to ask Eyjólf to take the episcopal position instead of him (*GP*, ch. 24).

the list contains a few names known already from passages placed earlier in the text:

- Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson¹⁷
- Tómas Þórarinnsson¹⁸
- Ívarr Jónsson¹⁹
- Grímr Hjaltason (monk)²⁰
- Erlendr (priest)²¹
- Bergr Gunnsteinsson²²
- Eyjólfur Snorrason²³
- Þorsteinn Kambason
- Guðmundr Þormóðarson (priest)
- Brandr Dálksson
- Pétur and Snorri Bárðarson²⁴
- Þórður Vermundarson
- Höskuldr Arason
- Kollsveinn Bjarnarson

The establishment of the historical significance of all the individuals listed here is difficult because of the missing information. It may be assumed that these people had enjoyed a certain esteem in society at the time, but also that the authors listed the names in order to give the sagas the status of reliable documents, regardless of the social position of these individuals. Nevertheless, the list of the participants differs dramatically from that included in the earlier passage about Guðmundr’s trip to Hólar as far as the number of individuals known from various sources is concerned.

The descriptions of people who followed Guðmundr change after the beginning of his episcopacy, in accordance with his growing

¹⁷ GA, ch. 113 and GB, ch. 78. The author is not consistent: he first mentions Guðmundr and Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson and then lists Hrafn again, as one of the fifteen companions. GD mentions only Hrafn, there is no list of any other travellers and the number of them is not given in the text either.

¹⁸ Ragneidar s(on), according to GB, ch. 78 (d. 7 May 1253), a priest in Selárdal, Genealogy 25 (name index/Sts II, p. 449).

¹⁹ Genealogy 28 (name index/Sts II, p. 409).

²⁰ Also referred to as *skáld* (name index/Sts II, p. 388).

²¹ Most probably Hallason from Ásgarðr (name index/Sts II, p. 380).

²² A priest, according to GB, ch. 78.

²³ Possibly a *skáld* from Haukabergr (name index/Sts II, p. 382).

²⁴ Genealogy 24, of Seldælir (name index/Sts II, pp. 429 and 438).

involvement in political or juridical matters. In passages which refer to the conflicts, the authors do not hesitate to mention that there were “good men”/ “brave men” with Guðmundr and many influential people among them.²⁵ As discussed above and in the previous chapter, during the saint’s priestly career his cousin Ögmundr, a respected chieftain, already supported him. In the summer 1208 he joined the bishop with Vigfús Önundarson, a priest,²⁶ Konáll Sokkason and “several more”.²⁷ In the battle at Víðines, where Kolbeinn Tumason was slain, Naddr Þórarinnsson²⁸ and Einarr Ólafsson²⁹ fell while fighting for the bishop.³⁰ After Guðmundr had been rescued by Eyjólfur Kársson from captivity, he travelled around the Hólar district with Eyjólfur Kársson, Einarr Hrafnsson (d. 1231),³¹ priest Ketill Ingjaldsson,³² Jón Ófeigsson,³³ and the brother of Eyjólfur Kársson.³⁴ Later on, when the bishop was in Reykjadalur, a lot of people came to him, Bergþórr Jónsson (d. 1232)³⁵ among them.³⁶ Eyjólfur also kept the saint company when he stayed at Málmey, together with Einarr *skemmingr* (d. 1222)³⁷ Pétur Bárðarson,³⁸ Aron Hjörleifsson, Ketill Ingjaldsson and “many others”.³⁹ *Jarteinabók Guðmundar byskups* mentions an extreme case when as many as three hundred *vildarmenn*, the chosen/distinguished people, accompanied the bishop as he was travelling around his district.⁴⁰ What is more, they only constituted half (sic!) of the following at that time.

Thus, various narrative sources maintain that there were individuals of significance who actively supported Guðmundr in the critical situations as well as during visitations. Laymen were the majority in

²⁵ E.g. GA, chs. 132, 141, 177; *Gjtb.* ch. 19; GB, ch. 89; GD, chs. 41 and 55.

²⁶ Genealogy 37.

²⁷ *ÍslS*, ch. 21; GB, ch. 89.

²⁸ *Arons saga*, ch. 7.

²⁹ *Arons saga*, ch. 7.

³⁰ GA, ch. 133; GB, ch. 91.

³¹ Genealogy 24, name index/*Sts* II, p. 379.

³² Name index/*Sts* II, p. 414, see also *DI* I, p. 516 (an editorial note to 133. (11 May 1237)).

³³ Genealogy 32, name index/*Sts* II, p. 411.

³⁴ *ÍslS*, ch. 37; GA ch. 168; GB, ch. 105.

³⁵ Genealogy 28, at Staðr in Steingrímsfjörður (name index/*Sts* II, p. 370).

³⁶ *ÍslS*, ch. 37; GA, ch. 168; GB, ch. 105.

³⁷ Hafur ráðamaðr’s brother, “frændi Guðmundar byskups”, see name index/*Sts* II, p. 378.

³⁸ Genealogy 24, name index/*Sts* II, p. 429.

³⁹ *ÍslS*, ch. 42; GA, ch. 177; GB, ch. 106.

⁴⁰ Ch. 9 (the date of that event is unknown).

Guðmundr’s following, although in one case the number of the clergy is certainly astonishing: three abbots, two monks, forty priests and “a lot of clerics” went with the bishop to face Kolbeinn Tumason in their final meeting (Víðínes).⁴¹ None of them, however, is mentioned by name in any source. Sturla’s intention in *Ísls*, favoured also by the authors of *GA* and *GB* might have been the depiction of the great popularity of Guðmundr among the clergy. The support of this particular group for Guðmundr against Kolbeinn in their final meeting might serve as a fine contrast to later events when so many clergymen joined Guðmundr’s opponents.

7.1.2. “The needy”, “the dependants” and “the poor”

A close examination of the passages devoted to Guðmundr’s journeys around the country shows that the poor people who followed him were, in fact, hardly a distinct gathering. In numerous miracle stories the beneficiaries are mentioned as “a poor man” or “a poor woman”. In the descriptions of Guðmundr’s following it is either clear from the context that the followers were not of high social status because little if any information is revealed (“a woman named...”, “a girl”), or they are even more anonymously introduced as “poor people”.⁴² The word which is always used in this context is *fátækr*. The term is very general and refers to the lack of means, material or financial support, and might be a direct translation of the Latin *pauper*.⁴³ In the Icelandic hagiographical material this word is predominant and encompasses various cases of poverty. Slightly more specific, though rarely used in the narratives concerning the Icelandic holy bishops, are such terms as *þurfamaðr* or *ómagi*. *Þurfamaðr* could be described as needy, the one who had the right to receive the tithe, *þurfamannatíund*, and food, *matgjafir*.⁴⁴ Different translations of *ómagi* have been suggested, a very general definition would be “one who is not able to take care of him- or herself”, a dependant.⁴⁵ The reason for such a situation may be

⁴¹ *Ísls*, ch. 21; *GA* ch. 132; *GB* ch. 89.

⁴² For example, when Guðmundr visited Þorey Grímsdóttir at Iorvi in Hákadalur, there were many men with him “þędi villdar menn ok fatękir menn”, *GJtb*, ch. 17; *GB*, ch. 134; *GD*, ch. 65.

⁴³ Wolfgang Gerhold, *Armut und Armenfürsorge im mittelalterlichen Island* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2002), 98–103.

⁴⁴ For a detailed discussion of the term *þurfamaður* in various sources see Gerhold, *Armut und Armenfürsorge*, pp. 80–2.

⁴⁵ Gerhold, *Armut und Armenfürsorge*, pp. 72–7.

e.g. a serious illness or old age, also children were often included among *ómagar*.

The terms certainly overlap in many aspects; the issue is very complex and depends not only on the genre, but also on the provenance and time of composition of the law codes. As Gerhold has demonstrated, in the passage concerning the same issue, *Jónsbók* mentions *fátækir* and *Grágás* refers to *ómagar*.⁴⁶ The third section of *Jónsbók*, which is devoted to the royal tax and the amount of money the payer should have for himself and the *ómagi* he takes care of, focuses on the difference between the two.⁴⁷ Also Árni Þorláksson's *Christian Law* and *Járnsíða* place the categories *ómagi* and *þurfamaðr* as synonyms in many cases, and the term *fátækr* is discussed separately in many other passages.⁴⁸ The focus on different aspects which the legal codes were expected to cover demanded a wide range of terminology which might not necessarily correspond with that used by the sagas.

The sagas, especially those concerning the three holy bishops, are not sources in which a detailed description of each type of pauper would be found. The authors were mainly preoccupied with the fact that an individual involved in an event or a miracle story lacked means and needed the saint's help. The act of help, the intervention of the saint and its result, a miracle, was what concerned the writers and compilers most. Therefore the terms used in the texts are not as precise as those known from the law codes. Guðmundr's mercy stayed very much in focus and this underlines that the number of people in need whom he supported was a crucial element of the *vitae*. However, the fact that the bishop was willing to let anyone join the group of his

⁴⁶ *Jónsbók. Lögbók Íslendinga hver samþykkt var á alþingi árið 1281 og endurnýjuð um miðja 14. öld en fyrst prentuð árið 1578*, ed. by Már Jónsson (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2004), p. 98.

⁴⁷ "[...] að þeir hjálpi því framfar og betur af því fé lögligum ómögum og fátækum frændum útlagans" ('Mannhelgi' 4).

⁴⁸ It is clear in such passages as: "Finnur og ómagi eða fátækur maður [...]" (11. "Um gröft í kirkjugarði"). For *ómagar* see the following sections in *Járnsíða*: 'Mannhelgi' 8, 'Erfðatal' 19, 24–5, 'Kaupabálkur' 18, 'Þjófabálkur' 7. In *Kristinnréttur Árna Þorlákssonar*: 10, 11, 14, 15, 30 and 32. The poor as *fátækir* are mainly discussed in the *Christian Law* (sections 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 26, 28, 34 and 35) in *Járnsíða* only in section 'Kaupabálkur' 11. Almsgiving and the permission to work on holy days are the main issues discussed. Whenever a suggestion of donating some money or goods is mentioned, "the poor" and the Church (churches, monasteries or "holy places") are usually the potential beneficiaries.

followers resulted in various incidents, many of which were negative and tested his patience.

7.1.3. *The unpopular*

Gerðist hann þá fjölmennr mjök, því at þau vǫru orð óvina hans, ef hann færi á staðinn með sekja menn, at þeir myndi drepa þá, er sekir vǫru. En þeir þorðu eigi við hann at skiljast, er sér vissu eigi annat traust.⁴⁹

A considerable number of those “outlawed men” mentioned here are not actual criminals, but rather the priests and laymen who supported Guðmundr against Kolbeinn Tumason or Sigurðr Ormsson and were outlawed by the chieftains solely because of that, since Kolbeinn himself and his supporters were excommunicated by Guðmundr. However, the bishop’s following did not only consist of individuals who had noble reasons. Beggars and vagrants are named, and it is clear that the latter, but often also the former, category bears a negative connotation. *Stafkarlar*, *göngumenn* and *-konur* are listed in a few passages along with “brave men”, for example during the battle at Víðines⁵⁰ or the feast at Jón Þorgrímsson’s place at Þverá in Hnjóskadalur.⁵¹

The model, the assistance of social outcasts, must not be perceived as the authorial proof for Guðmundr’s popularity and the people’s respect for his holiness. The reason for their participation in this type of “crusade” would not always be a personal grudge against any of the chieftains or the desire to defend the bishop. The goal, as in numerous European medieval societies, was probably engagement in struggles with hope for some material benefit, food, etc. It is clear that parts of Guðmundr’s following only stayed with him when they considered the situation safe: during the attack by Chieftain Þorvaldr Vatnsfirðingr⁵² at Hólar (Easter, 29 March 1209) a lot of men deserted the bishop and

⁴⁹ “His following had grown quite large by then, for his enemies let it be known that if he went to his see with the outlawed men they meant to kill those who were outlawed. But those men, who had no other hope of protection, dared not part with him” (*Ísls*, ch. 21; *GA*, ch. 130; *GB* ch. 89).

⁵⁰ “Þar var ok margt röskra manna með honum, en sumt stafkarlar ok göngukonar” (*Ísls*, ch. 21; *GA*, ch. 132; *GB*, ch. 89). These were not the only medieval Icelandic expressions used in reference to beggars and vagrants, but since they are emphasized in the narratives concerning Guðmundr, I shall omit all the other ones discussed e.g. by Gerhold (Gerhold, *Armut und Armenfürsorge*, pp. 82–93).

⁵¹ *GJtb* ch. 19; *GB*, ch. 135; *GD*, ch. 68.

⁵² Genealogy 27.

some joined his enemies.⁵³ Guðmundr's opponents certainly appreciated those extra resources Sturla Þórðarson wrote that when the killing had come to an end, the chieftains took as followers those men they liked, and gave them quarter.⁵⁴ As far as Guðmundr's reaction to his followers' behaviour is concerned, the narratives note his anger after receiving the news about the pillaging and robbery at Arnórr Tumason's and Sigurðr Ormsson's estates.⁵⁵ At the times when they behaved more or less correctly, at least in the presence of the bishop and some of his influential followers, Guðmundr focused on solving the conflicts instead of turning his attention to the unruly members of his flock. The visit to Jón Þorgrímsson's farm, during which the hungry mob plundered the man's estate, proved to be a chastisement to the saint.⁵⁶ With all his kindness and mercy for the unfortunate ones, Guðmundr had to realize that even rich farmers deserve a different approach and should not be visited with an uncontrollable, hungry crowd.⁵⁷

Ísls contains a few interesting descriptions of some unruly individuals, among others a man referred to as Eyjólfur *hríðarefni*, who was with Guðmundr at Helgastaðir in Reykjadalur nyrðri 29 August 1220 and was killed by Arnórr Tumason's men.⁵⁸ Although he does not appear elsewhere in any narrative, Eyjólfur is, nevertheless, mentioned by the bishop as one of the bravest men he knew and one of his friends during the conversation with Archbishop Þórir.⁵⁹ The saga material does not reveal what kind of "unruly man" Eyjólfur was, whether he was a farmer

⁵³ *Ísls*, ch. 24; *GA*, ch. 141; *GB*, ch. 95. It is, however, not explicitly stated that these people were those of dubious reputation.

⁵⁴ *Ísls*, ch. 24; *GA*, ch. 142; *GB*, ch. 95. Others were fined, forced to accept their self-judgement, and "four good men, two priests and two laymen, had to prove by carrying hot irons that they had not killed Kolbeinn". An interesting thing to notice here is the fact that Konall Sokkason who was given a quarter by Sighvatr Sturluson along with Snorri, the son of priest Vigfúss, is mentioned by Guðmundr in the conversation with the archbishop as one of his friends and the bravest people together with Vigfúss, Eyjólfur Kársson, Aron Hjörleifsson, Einarr *skemmingr*, Sveinn Jónsson (*sveitarbót*), Einarr *klerkr* and Eyjólfur *hríðarefni* (*GB*, ch. 101).

⁵⁵ *Ísls*, ch. 21; *GA* ch. 135; *GB*, ch. 92.

⁵⁶ *GJb* ch. 19; *GB*, ch. 135; *GD*, ch. 68.

⁵⁷ Hallvard Magerøy has discussed this story in comparison with a similar one from *Guðmundar saga dýra* (Hallvard Magerøy, 'Guðmundr góði'). There is a possibility of borrowing, but in Magerøy's view the story concerning Guðmundr is earlier and more historically credible.

⁵⁸ Ch. 37; *GA*, ch. 172; *GB*, ch. 106.

⁵⁹ *GB*, ch. 101.

who had been involved in some serious arguments or a vagrant. It is difficult to estimate how many outcasts followed the saint, and how many of them had good intentions. The image of a “noble outcast” might be a motif borrowed from imported literature where vagrants indeed constituted a large part of the population, but who also had the opportunity to take active part in such events as crusades, pilgrimages, fairs, etc. Due to the steady growth of the population and difficult conditions especially in the fourteenth century, the number of vagrants and beggars must have been significant in Iceland.⁶⁰

The law codes clearly show a negative attitude towards vagrancy. In *Grágás* the very definition of vagrancy is quite detailed and leaves no doubt about its consequences:

Ef maðr feR vaflonar förvm halfan manað. eða lengr iNan fiordungs oc varðar þat utlegð. oc sva ef hann feR allz manað oc or fiordungi ens-cis orendis nema hlifa bue sino eða griðe. Ef maðr feR oc þiGr olmoso gíafir hálfan manað eða lengr eþa hefir gistingar þar er hann getr oc er sa göngo maðr. Ef maðr göriz hvsgangs maðr heill oc sva hravstr at haN mætte fa ser .ii. missera vist ef hann villdi viNa sem hann mætti oc varðar þat scog Gang oc er rétt at stefna þar er hann vissi natt stað hans siðarst. oc queðia til .ix. bva a þingi fra stefno stöðom.⁶¹

Likewise, according to *Jónsbók*, people who roamed around in search of alms and refused to work risked flogging and outlawry.⁶² The paragraph in *Grágás* on boarding itinerants and vagrants, however, allows certain help to any poor individual who moves around the country

⁶⁰ Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga*, p. 250.

⁶¹ “If a man moves about on pointless journeys within a Quarter for half a month or more, the penalty for it is a fine, and similarly if he does it for a month in all and leaves the Quarter with no purpose except to relieve his own household or the one he is attached to. If a man moves about and accepts charity for half a month or more and takes night lodgings where he can get them, he is a vagrant. If a man turns into a tramp—a healthy man and so able-bodied that he could get lodging for a whole year if he would do the work he is capable of—his penalty is full outlawry, and it is lawful to summon him at the place of summoning at the assembly”, (‘Þingskapa-þáttur’, K 82. The English translation of the passages from *Grágás* is based on *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, trans. by A. Dennis and others, 2 vols. (Winnipeg, 1980), I.

⁶² ‘Mannhelgi’, ch. 29. See *DI* II, 155. (2 July 1294) *Réttarbót Eiríks konungs Magnússonar* ad. *Jónsbók*: “Þeim monnum skal eigi gefaz almvsá er ganga hvsa a meðal oc bera uopn”, also 157. “Réttarbót Eiríks konungs Magnússonar um framfærslu skyldmenna, um ómenskumenn og vergangsmenn og um handsöl” (only variant A): “ómenskumenn er ganga á húsgang fyrir nenningarleysi”. See also *DI* II, 859; *DI* VI, 702; *DI* IX, 581. Björn Þorsteinsson and Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, ‘Norska öldin’, in *Saga Islands*, ed. by Sigurður Línal, 8 vols. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, IV (1989), 61–258 (p. 112).

and the difference between “any poor individual” and “a vagrant” seems vague in many passages.⁶³ The vagrants were, in theory, provided with some minimal help within their communes, although it was a condition that should have been prevented at all costs.⁶⁴ In *Grágás* numerous sections show that being in charge of dependents (*ómagar*) meant also preventing them from becoming a vagrant and the negligence of a dependent was punished with lesser outlawry. All the sections concerning dependents reveal a good and safe strategy that would prevent the Icelandic society from poverty and vagrancy in those who are unable to take care of themselves.⁶⁵ Going from house to house was still presented as the most negative alternative. In fact, if a dependent was not taken care of properly and became a vagrant, the person responsible for that deserved a penalty of lesser outlawry.⁶⁶ As a result, those who did act so solely out of laziness or “perversity”, that is, “indolence or such other failings as make good men unwilling to have them”.⁶⁷ *Ómagar* are also discussed in numerous sections of *Jónsbók*.⁶⁸ “Framfærslubálkur” mentions the duty to maintain a dependent and the punishment for the negligence of it and letting the person go from place to place in order to beg for help.⁶⁹ Another vital issue addressed by this section is that of the children of those who walked around with a begging staff, which suggests that the fate of the beggars was a concern of medieval Icelandic society.

Laws concerning vagrancy in *Grágás* are considered to be stricter than later medieval law codes.⁷⁰ The change may have taken place due to e.g. a more general change in legal procedures or/and a better

⁶³ *Additions*, 218 (AM 315 B fol., 6; Ib 229–30; St 112, II 145/4–24; K, Add. 217).

⁶⁴ In K 156, ‘Festa-þátrr’ (on intercourse with/having a child by a vagrant woman), however, a more considerate approach towards this social group may be observed (just like in *Additions*, 218). In general, the whole collection focuses more on individual responsibility instead of particular cases or general norms.

⁶⁵ ‘Ómaga Bálkr’ (The Dependents’ Section), K 128 and K 143 as well as the paragraphs concerning the dependents in *Additions*.

⁶⁶ K 130, this paragraph is a new law according to St 90, II, 121/18.

⁶⁷ K 143. Here St 117, II 151/5–7, continues with the clause on castrating vagrants found in K 254. Add. 216–18. See also the Inheritance section (‘Arfa-Þátrr’) K 118 on children of vagrants and their rights to inherit.

⁶⁸ ‘Mannhelgi’, ‘Kvennagiftingar’, ‘Erfðatal’ and ‘Framfærslubálkur’.

⁶⁹ “[...] gjalda konungi sex aura og varðveiti þó ómaga sem mælt én”.

⁷⁰ Björn Þorsteinsson and Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, ‘Norska öldin’, p. 112, see also Gerhold, *Armut und Armenfürsorge*, pp. 92–3.

organized system of material aid in fourteenth-century Iceland.⁷¹ Theologians and clergy all across medieval Europe encouraged among the faithful the willingness to support all those who were in need and the pursuit of the *imitatio Christi* ideal.⁷² In Iceland the necessity to provide poor people with the material support they needed was as important as in other parts of medieval Christendom, which is reflected in the texts of many sermons. "Er þá bæði postulum Guðs og spámönnum sjá hátið haldin, ef vér erum ölmusugóðir og veitum voluðum sem postular Drottins vors gerðu", advised the author of a sermon on All Saints' Day.⁷³ However, as various types of sources reveal, the views on poverty differed depending on the circumstances and on the attitude of the paupers towards the possibility of receiving aid.⁷⁴ Although vagrants and beggars were among the needy as well as dependents, the expressions *göngumenn* (and *-konur*), *ómagar* or *fátækir* were not synonymous.⁷⁵ It was not the very act of begging or poverty but the individual's intentions and the entire social context that defined him or her as either a beggar/vagrant or a member of the "decent" poor. Vagrancy and begging was tolerated, but was not supposed to be a goal in itself or take a violent form. The narratives concerning Guðmundr do not seem to indicate that anyone was supposed to feel entitled to his support regardless of their attitude, as the stories about the plunder reveal. Only genuine piety and hard work as well as the willingness to share (regardless of one's material situation)

⁷¹ One of the alterations in the approach towards vagrancy concerns the issue of castrating vagrants, mentioned in *Grágás* but absent in *Jónsbók*, possibly under the influence of Norwegian laws (Gerhold, *Armut und Armenfürsorge*, p. 92).

⁷² Bronisław Geremek, *Poverty. A History* (Oxford, UK and Cambridge/Massachusetts, USA: Blackwell Publishings, 1997), 36–5; Swanson, *Religion and Devotion*, pp. 206–34, esp. 209–12; Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga*, p. 252.

⁷³ "We celebrate the feast of both God's Apostles and prophets when we are charitable and give to the needy as Lord's Apostles did" (<http://www.lexis.hi.is/ordlyklar/homilia/homil.txt1.htm>). Almsgiving is depicted as an essential part of every believer's life in numerous sermons of the *Icelandic Homily Book*: [Á boðunardagi sællar Mariu meyjar og móður Guðs], [Kirkjuhelgi], [Jól], [Trúarjátningin], [Fasta], [Resurrectio Domini], [Altari og musteri Krists], [Á allra heilagra messudag sermon], [Í föstuinnangang].

⁷⁴ For a detailed discussion of the Icelandic system of social help, also in comparison with the models known from other European countries, see Gerhold, *Armut und Armenfürsorge*.

⁷⁵ Agneta Breisch, *Frid och fredlöshet. Sociala band och utanförskap på Island under äldre medeltid*. Studia historica Upsaliensia, 174 (Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, 1994), p. 123 and Gerhold, *Armut und Armenfürsorge*, p. 73.

were rewarded, and decent behaviour was expected from those who were allowed to follow him.

The law codes reveal that help for the needy was well organised in the medieval Icelandic society. However, since laws are normative sources it must be borne in mind that they do not always reflect the actual circumstances. It is thus possible that vagrancy was not entirely eliminated. The *göngumenn* and *göngukonur/húsgöngumenn* or *staðkarlar* are only sporadically listed among Bishop Guðmundr's followers, otherwise the ones who receive his blessings and help at Hólar or elsewhere are *fátækir/fátækar*. Guðmundr cured a significant number of people suffering from serious disabilities. Children, old people, disabled people who could have been classified as *ómagar* were among the beneficiaries of the posthumous miracles or those which took place during his priesthood. Nevertheless, during the years of his episcopacy Guðmundr earned the title of the *fátækra faðir*, the "father" of all those who needed material help and all the fourteenth-century variants underline that particular aspect in the passages which refer to the years 1203–37. The authorial comments show that the saint's intention was to mainly help the people who suffered poverty due to natural disasters and misfortunes, and despite their hard work or the ability to take care of themselves.

7.2. *The resident poor*

7.2.1. *Relatives*

Guðmundr's generosity towards the "resident poor", the ones who did not follow him on his journeys but were visited by him also met criticism from two sides: lay and clerical. Already during his priesthood Guðmundr supposedly used his annual stipend to buy food and clothes for the ones who needed material help, although the sources disagree about the recipients: while *GP* and *GA* mention "the poor **and** his [Guðmundr's] kinsfolk", according to *GB* and *GD* they were specifically "his poor relatives".⁷⁶ What is more, while the majority of sources name only seven recipients of alms who were *ómagar*, *GD* adds Guðmundr's mother as the eighth one, for he "cared for her till

⁷⁶ Bold mine, *GP* ch. 11; *GA* ch. 25; *GB* ch. 22; *GD* ch. 7.

the end of her life”.⁷⁷ In either case, the practice had to be stopped and Guðmundr was moved to a different parish. Gunnar F. Guðmundsson suggests that the yearly salary of a priest (*þingaprestr*) was rather good at the time, even as much as the value of five cows per year. During Lárentíus Kálfsson’s episcopacy as many as twelve needy received support at Hólar. Guðmundr’s aid for the needy might have simply been a novelty too difficult for the laymen to accept.⁷⁸

Still, making an exact calculation of how much money and whose money Guðmundr was spending on the poor he maintained, is very problematic. It is in fact unclear what kind of stipend it was and who gave it to him, whether it was means provided by the bishop or a salary which he received as a priest, for instance from particular chieftains who hosted him. It is especially difficult since it is problematic to define his precise status in all the particular places he visited and where he stayed for different periods of time, and what authors meant by referring to his “home”.⁷⁹ It is, in fact, hard to establish that Guðmundr had one specific place where he would be based at the time:

Table 1. Guðmundr’s priestly career till his mother’s death

1186	received his priestly ordination and stayed with his uncle Grímr at Hof, and was a parish priest there
1187	experienced the death of his best friend Þorgeirr Brandsson, which led to the big change in his conduct. It all took place while he (presumably) still worked at Hof. On this occasion the use of his “annual stipend” for the maintenance of seven* people (provision of food and clothes) is mentioned
1188–1190	stayed as a guest at Miklabær
1190	stayed at Viðvík with Má Finnsson (and held services there, but his specific duties are not mentioned by the narratives)
1191	Arnþrúðr Fornadóttir invited Guðmundr to Vellir/Svarfaðardal to stay with her and supervise her household affairs

⁷⁷ “[...] veitti hann henni vakra umhyggju allt til daudadags”.

⁷⁸ Chapters 40 and 41 of *Lárentíus saga* describe in detail how the bishop dealt with poverty.

⁷⁹ *GP*, ch. 18, *GA*, ch. 32, *GB*, ch. 52; see 2.2. above. It is possible that Guðmundr’s status was that of a district priest, a subject of the household he belonged to at the moment, especially in the places where he stayed for more than a year (Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland* 2000, pp. 201–9).

Table 1 (*cont.*)

1196	left Vellir. Went to: Haukadal (reason unknown), to Svínafell (invitation from Sigurður Ormsson), later travelled to: Fljótsdalshérað, Vopnafjörður, Öxarfjörður, Eyjafjörður, Úfsir (visits?)
1198	received an invitation from Kolbeinn Arnórsson to Staðr/Ska-gafjörður
1199	stayed with Kolbeinn Tumason at Viðímýri and received many invitations in Borgarfjörður; went to Hvammur to the wedding of Snorri Sturluson, then to: Fagrðal, Reykjahólar, Steingrimsfjörður, after which he was back at Viðímýri with Kolbeinn
1200	travelled to Hólar to participate in the <i>translatio</i> of Jón Ögmundarson's relics. While he afterwards travelled to Eyjafjörður and was "away from his home", Úlfheiður, his mother, died, and was buried at Hólar

Another issue is the maintenance of his mother; the narratives provide no hints as to where she stayed till the end of her life. It is quite possible that her father-in-law's farm (where she moved when Guðmundr was a child after his father's departure for Norway) was regarded as her home, and that the sources allude to that place.

Those questions must remain open. The situation during Guðmundr's episcopacy is clearer. Already at the beginning of it Guðmundr had to face Kolbeinn Tumason's opposition when he decided to provide the needy who stayed with him at Hólar (possibly from the day he moved there after the consecration) with a meal twice a day. The chieftain moved them into a lodging house and allowed them only one meal per day.⁸⁰ At the same time, the bishop wanted to establish his nephews, specifically: *bróðursynir* at Kálfsstaðir (as he was not allowed to take them to Hólar) with the goods he had had from the previous summer, but Kolbeinn took the place with his followers instead.⁸¹ Again, it is

⁸⁰ GP ch. 26; GA ch. 106; GB ch. 70; GD ch. 22.

⁸¹ GP ch. 26; GA ch. 106; GB ch. 70 and GD, ch. 22 mention "einn bróðursonr". The statement is rather surprising as the sources mention clearly that none of Guðmundr's brothers survived childhood (see 2.2. above). Various explanations are possible here: the information could be an error copied by authors and compilers, or perhaps the sons/son of Guðmundr's foster brother are referred to here (it cannot be stated with certainty how many foster brothers he had, but Þorgrím *alíkarl* could be an example (see 3.1. above).

unclear who were the needy he provided with food and lodgings or who the relatives were; no names are given, and none of the authors says what happened to them afterwards.⁸² The chieftain's opposition might have been triggered both by maintaining a group of paupers (dependents) at Hólar, and by the fact that they were the bishop's relatives, in other words: rather privileged paupers.

The chieftain's decision seems to have been rather harsh, but not entirely impossible to understand. According to the law codes, individuals who were impoverished as a result of specific causes were entitled to some social help, at least in theory, from the communes, *hreppar*.⁸³ During the Commonwealth period, it was the responsibility of the leaders of the communes to distribute the tithes and food to the poor, and organize their movements round the commune. At every assembly attendance, a dues paying farmer had to provide hospitality for the poor for a certain period of time, the duration of which was related to his wealth. The provisions for those in need do not seem to have been implemented in strict accordance with law. This led to the chieftains taking on some responsibility for the needy.⁸⁴ After the fall of the Commonwealth the situation did not change much. Passages from both *Járnsíða* and *Jónsbók* reveal that the maintenance of the poor was still one of the main tasks of the communes. Even if the system indeed worked as well as the law codes might suggest, the regular maintenance of several needy might cost quite a lot. It is difficult to assess what category those people might have belonged to or how many they were. *Þurfamenn* were entitled to the tithe (*þurfamannatíund*) and the food (*matgjafir*), but *ómagar* were supposed to be provided with full support, which would explain Kolbeinn's reluctance to host them.

⁸² Since it is highly unlikely that any of Guðmundr's siblings survived childhood, which makes the question hardly possible to answer. A cleric named Helgi, Eiríkr and Óttar *snoppulangur* are referred to as *bróðursynir Guðmundar byskups*, but their patronymics are unknown (*Sts* I, p. 550, note 26/7). In *GD* ch. 65 it is mentioned, however, that when Guðmundr returned from his first visit to Norway in 1218, he was welcomed among others by his *frendr*.

⁸³ On the structure and activities of the communes see Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Chieftains and Power*, pp. 194–9 (the Commonwealth period), Björn Þorsteinsson and Sigurður Línal, 'Lögfesting Konungsvalds', in *Saga Íslands*, ed. by Sigurður Línal, 8 vols. (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1978), 80–108 (pp. 72–3). See also Björn Þorsteinsson and Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, 'Norska öldin', pp. 103–12. Gerhold's discussion of *hreppr* provides a detailed description of aid for the needy (Gerhold, *Armut und Armenfürsorge*, pp. 131–214).

⁸⁴ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Chieftains and Power*, p. 198.

Nevertheless, for the hagiographers such decisions could not be left without consequences. After the first serious argument with Kolbeinn the chieftain was excommunicated by Guðmundr. Saga authors refer to this event as the punishment which the bishop executed for (among others) the harsh treatment of his poor relatives (*fátækum frændum sínum*).⁸⁵

People referred to as Guðmundr's relatives are mentioned several times in various narratives. Quite often the context suggests little social/historical significance or life in poverty, for example, in one miracle story a woman named Þorgerðr vowed to give alms to Guðmundr's relatives if her childbirth would be successful.⁸⁶ None of them is recorded as a recipient of a miraculous provision, though, or directly involved in any story of that kind. The Old Norse word for "kin", *frændi*, was one of the words used for family relationships most frequently in the sagas. These were primarily used to describe ties between an individual and his/her father, foster father, brother, nephew, male cousin, uncle or grandfather. It was from this group that the individual could expect to receive help in the first place.⁸⁷ Chieftains, especially, were worth referring to as one's remote kinsmen in case of danger, although the blood relationship could not always be proved. A similar principle might have worked in Guðmundr's case: being (even remotely) connected to "the father of the poor" was very significant for many Icelanders. For the authors of the *vitae* his poor relatives were worth mentioning in order to underline that the bishop also had poor relatives. It was another factor that made him more approachable to the faithful and could serve as a counterbalance to the later accusations of Guðmundr's abuse of hospitality.

7.2.2. *Friends*

Guðmundr's "friends" are a large and varied group. As in the case of his "relatives", the term is used rather freely and may signify also people who were on the saint's side or who had a relatively good relationship with him. Certainly, the authors wished to present Guðmundr as an individual who enjoyed popularity, but the Icelandic connotations of the term "friend" known from *Sturlunga saga* can hardly be

⁸⁵ *ÍslS*, ch. 20; *GA* ch. 128; *GB* ch. 88.

⁸⁶ *GJtb*, ch. 37; *GB*, ch. 145d.

⁸⁷ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Chieftains and Power*, pp. 143–4.

applied in this context. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, different types of relationship may be referred to as “friendship”. In the narratives concerning Guðmundr’s friends were e.g. Chieftain Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, Priest Þorgeirr Brandsson, Eyjólfur *hríðarefni*, St. Ambrose and the Virgin Mary. They were the friends who enjoyed high social status and who assisted Guðmundr by either defending him in a conflict or providing spiritual support. The poor or needy people referred to as “friends” were recipients of several “first aid miracles”, that is: the provision of food. Ingibjörg, the sister of Helgi Lambkársson in Aðalvík and a woman named Oddkatla from an unknown place (presumably somewhere in the North) are recorded as Guðmundr’s friends.⁸⁸ They both benefited from having confidence in Guðmundr’s blessings, and by the use of water consecrated by him.⁸⁹ Arngrímr added two other stories where the recipients were an anonymous male and an anonymous female friend of the saint.⁹⁰

Those “friends” offered their hospitality to Guðmundr during his priesthood and episcopacy as well as to his following, and were always well rewarded for it. The poorer they were and the more they offered, the more they received in return. The example of a woman living in the vicinity of Hólar, introduced as Guðmundr’s female friend and compared by Arngrímr to the biblical Martha, is rather extraordinary.⁹¹

The traditional medieval Icelandic concept of friendship based on gift giving, which is so often mentioned in the discussions about the relations between chieftains and farmers during the Commonwealth period, might also be referred to in this context. The friends’ hospitality was rewarded with the saint’s blessings, and the relative prosperity of some of them would certainly fit in the traditional scheme of reciprocity. The “gift exchange” between Guðmundr and his “friends” took place according to quite different principles. These were the biblical principles of sharing goods with others and some of the miracles resemble Christ’s miracles of the multiplication of food. Besides, nothing indicates that Guðmundr’s “friends” were especially privileged

⁸⁸ Ingibjörg: *GJtb*, ch. 26; *GB*, ch. 140; *GD*, ch. 65. Oddkatla: *GJtb*, ch. 27; *GB*, ch. 141.

⁸⁹ Ingibjörg led a calf she was going to kill to a well previously consecrated by Guðmundr and the amount of meat was miraculously multiplied, while Oddkatla washed her face troubled by *jótr* with holy water and the disease disappeared.

⁹⁰ The case where a man is the recipient might be a repetition of the miracle for Jón Brandsson (see 4.2.2. above).

⁹¹ See 6.2. above.

among the needy he supported, although a lot of them are explicitly introduced as poor people, and it would be understandable if he focused on them. No material (votive) offerings from anyone referred to as Guðmundr's "friend" or "relative" are recorded in the sources either. The authors obviously listed them among the beneficiaries of the "food provision" miracles in order to show that the bishop knew the problem of poverty very well and did not surround himself solely with the learned clergy or powerful laymen. However, it might also suggest that the arguments with certain chieftains influenced the social status of Guðmundr's friends (at least some) and family.

7.3. *The prodigies and the vengeance of the saint*

7.3.1. *Provision miracles*

The stories that tell about miracles which reportedly took place in the years 1203–1237 underline the importance of the provision of food.⁹² This type of *in vita* miracle, hardly present in material describing Guðmundr's priesthood, seems to be predominant during his episcopacy. Material exchange between the saint and the faithful is rather intensive in those narratives: Guðmundr either supported the poor who asked him for help to survive the hard times, or provided with food those who were hospitable towards him and his followers. In several cases the texts contain information about bad seasons, which increases the meaning of the entire event, such as the feast at Jón Þorgrímsson's house, or help for the woman who cooked grass/turf because she had nothing else to give to her children. The recipients are varied: Guðmundr's "friends", rich farmers, farmers of average income and poor women (in two cases living alone with children—see Appendix 2). The majority of the events resemble Christ's miracles known from the New Testament, especially the multiplication of food, in two cases it is a surprising amount of fish to feed the visiting bishop and his following.⁹³ The most touching example is certainly that of a poor woman who put some turf in a pot and pretended it was meat hoping in despair that her hungry children would fall asleep while waiting for

⁹² Except for the incident involving Jón Brandsson, all the miracle stories that concentrate on the provision of food are included in the fourteenth century sources. See Appendix 2.

⁹³ *GD*, chs. 68 and 87.

the meal and forget about their empty stomachs for a while. As the children slept the woman went out to ask Bishop Guðmundr (who was visiting the place that day) for help. His blessing turned the cooked turf into meat.⁹⁴ Another spectacular example was that of a woman from Strandir who cooked some grass in water previously consecrated by Guðmundr and survived on it the whole summer.⁹⁵

Arngrímr Brandsson’s variant mentions bad seasons in the description of Guðmundr’s charitable acts more often than other writers. The author did not hesitate to allude to the chieftains’ scepticism about that. Guðmundr was willing to help the inhabitants of the Northern Quarter survive the harsh time, even against the will of his advisor, Sigurðr Ormsson, who did not appreciate the bishop’s generosity.⁹⁶ Guðmundr’s goodness was by no means restricted by the boundaries of the Hólar bishoprics, or even Iceland. The miracle of the silver bowl, as the sources report, took place when Guðmundr was staying in Norway with the archbishop.⁹⁷ The event was, as the authors maintain, known both in Norway and Iceland. Three beggars came to Guðmundr to ask him for help. The bishop decided to sacrifice a silver bowl that he had received from the archbishop. Worried about the equal division of the only valuable thing he was able to give them he prayed to God and the object, hitting the floor, fell apart into three pieces of identical weight.

There were some who refused to grant Guðmundr their hospitality during his visits and were punished for that. One event of that kind has been dated to the period of Guðmundr’s priesthood. In November/

⁹⁴ *GJtb*, ch. 13; *GB*, ch. 129; *GD*, ch. 65.

⁹⁵ *GJtb*, ch. 12; *GB*, ch. 128; *GD*, ch. 65.

⁹⁶ Ch. 26. It is not difficult, however, to understand Sigurðr’s attitude. He wished to save the estate from disaster: “Þann fyrsta vetr, sem herra [Guðmundr sat] heima at Hólum, lagðist með guðs dómi svá grátlig hörmung ok hallæri yfir fólkit, at fyrir þrot bóndans hnigu fátækir menn niðr af sulti, svo at hundruðum skipti í einum samt norðanlands fjörðungi”.

⁹⁷ Þórir (abp. 1206–14) and Guttormr/Guðormr (abp. 1215–24) or Guttorm and Pétur Brynjólfsson (abp. 1225–6). Guðmundr stayed twice in Norway: in the years 1214–18 and 1222–1226, and the story might be placed in different years. The miracle is extant in *GJtb*, ch. 4. and *GB*, ch. 118; *GD*, chs. 51 and 62. *GD* mentions the event twice, with slight variations, possibly referring to Guðmundr’s two stays in Norway (Stefán Karlsson, personal communication): in ch. 51 the recipients are four poor people (Guðmundr prays to God the Father, Jesus and Mary, and throws the bowl on the floor), while ch. 62, (‘Frá ölmuþugæðum byskups’), includes the tale about the silver bowl the number of the beggars is, again, three. Guðmundr prays to God the Father only and the bowl falls on the floor of its own accord.

December 1200 he stopped in Langadalur and asked for the strongest and fattest horse they had. The inhabitants refused to do that and the same night their best horse walked into the home pond and drowned.⁹⁸ During his episcopacy an event of a similar significance took place:

Fyrir Máríumessu ina síðari sendi biskup mann í Múla á Skálmarnes til Oddleifs prests, at hann vildi þar veita tíðir Máríumessu ok vera þar við níunda mann. En prestur talðist undan ok þóttist eigi mega við þeim taka. Þá beiddist biskup at vera við inn þriðja mann, áðr þeir skildu. En prestur talðist undan eigi at síðr. Þá sagði biskup, at hann myndi henda meira misfelli á þeim missirum en þó at hann æli biskup við þriðja mann. Ok þat gekk svá, at annat sumar um nóttina fyrir Máríumessu brann þar upp bærinn allr at köldum kolum.⁹⁹

One might argue that the incident demonstrates both Guðmundr's prophetic skills and his intention to chastise the man; the passage is a rather standard example of "holy vengeance", one of quite a few in *Guðmundar sögur*. The unfortunate priest was not only an individual who refused to host Guðmundr, but as a clergyman he was expected to give him support, not oppose the bishop. Shortly afterwards when the bishop continued his journey in the West and then turned in the direction of Hólar accompanied by Eyjólfur Kársson and others, the men of Eyjafjörður denied them the access to their households.¹⁰⁰ In Reykjadalur the farmers found hosting the large group difficult, but offered what they could. As the journey continued, a man named Ívarr from Múli first received Guðmundr and his men courteously, but when he heard that the bishop was going to visit him once again after his stay at Grenjaðarstaðir, he prepared himself "as if for a battle", and decided not to let the flock in. As a result he was accused by the bishop of having an "unclean spirit".¹⁰¹

The stories about the people of Langadalur and the priest at Múli are interesting as tales of saintly chastisement, possibly inspired by

⁹⁸ GP, ch. 19; GA, ch. 86; GB, ch. 59; GD, ch. 16.

⁹⁹ "Before the Latter Feast of the Virgin Mary the bishop sent a man to Múli on Skálmarnes, to Oddleif the priest, with a message that he would be holding services there on the feast day and would come with eight men. But the priest put him off and didn't think he could receive him. Then the Bishop asked whether he might come with two others, but the priest would not accept this any more readily. Then the Bishop said that in the coming year the priest would be struck by greater misfortune than that he should have to put up a bishop with two other men. Thus it happened that the following summer on the night before the Feast of the Virgin Mary the entire household there burnt right down to cold coals" (*ÍslS*, ch. 37; GA, ch. 166; GB, ch. 105).

¹⁰⁰ *ÍslS*, ch. 37; GA, ch. 168 and GB, ch. 105.

¹⁰¹ *ÍslS*, ch. 37 and GB, ch. 105; GA, ch. 169. See also chs. 42 and 76.

the examples included in the imported *vitae* and other writings.¹⁰² The incidents from the period of Guðmundr’s episcopacy show the farmers’ loyalty to Guðmundr’s opponents, but also fear of being deprived of their provisions by “the father of the poor” and his group. Ívarr’s lack of trust and denial of hospitality in the third example was only met with the bishop’s verbal condemnation, which might have had much graver consequence for the man than the material damage in the other two cases. A comment on “provoking” God’s servants (which might both mean clergymen and saints) follows the Langadalur incident in *GD*: “What blessed Gregory narrates in the first book of *Dialogues* is fulfilled here, that once God’s servant is irritated, his mind shall never be provoked again”.¹⁰³

The holy prelate lived first and foremost for the people entrusted to him by God.¹⁰⁴ This activity took three different forms: *gubernatio*, *visitatio* and *correctio*. The first one concerned veneration (e.g. promoting the cult of saints) and sacraments. *Visitatio* constituted a vital part of the episcopacy as the direct contact with the faithful and the general behaviour of the prelates during their visitation were important aspects frequently mentioned in hagiographies of holy bishops. The third form concerned the bishop’s responsibility to intervene in case of various abuses, especially in the moral sphere. The Christian Law section of *Grágás* provides the following passage:

Byskopa scolom ver hafa tvá alandi her. Scal annaR byskop vera at stoli i skala holti. enn annaR at hölum ihiallta dali. oc scal sa hafa yfir fór vm norplendinga fiorþvng. er ihiallta dali er. vm siN a .xij. manuþum [...] Byskop er við þat skyldr. þa er hann ferr vm fiorþunga. at koma ilavg hrepp hvern. sva at meN nae fvndi hans [...]

Bvandi sa er vist veitir byskopi á et fá honum reiþ skióta. Þann dag er hann ferr a bravt. Hvskarlar hans oc buar ero skyldir at lia hrossa byskopi þeir er hann biþr til. Sekr er sa .iij. morkvm er syniar. ef hross a til.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Twelfth-century books of miracles and thirteenth-century processes include prodigies by which saints took vengeance on those who refused to believe in their *virtus* and who blasphemed against them. This type of miracle persisted up to the end of the Middle Ages, but became numerically insignificant. (Vauchez, *Sainthood in the later Middle Ages*, p. 474, ft. 97).

¹⁰³ “Kemr þat hér fram, sem sæll Gregorius vottar í fyrstu bók Dialogorum, at ef guðs þjónustumaðr verðr reittr, verðr ok hans hugskot eigi seinna provoceraðr” (ch. 16).

¹⁰⁴ Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 298–300.

¹⁰⁵ “We shall have two bishops in the country. One shall have his seat at Skálaholt, the other at Hólar in Hjaltadalr. The one in Hjaltadalr is to make a visitation in the Quarter of the Norðlendingar once every twelve months [...] When he travels through

Visitatio and *correctio* are the two forms that are most explicit in the stories of provision of food and the saint's 'vengeance'. A surprising feature, considering Guðmundr's otherwise gentle approach towards many issues such as keeping certain days holy. Guðmundr had to defend his arguments in a conversation with the Norwegian archbishop's clerics who accused him of serving meat twice on a fast day/ Friday and keeping the fast if Christmas Day were on Friday.¹⁰⁶ Both debates ended successfully for the saint who surprised the clerics by saying that the celebration of Christ's birth was more important than keeping the fast on such a day. Guðmundr's kindness and tolerance was, however, limited, and that showed clearly in situations when he demanded shelter. The consequences of not following the order of the holy prelate could be severe and the hagiographers would not miss the opportunity to describe it.

7.3.2. *Rescue miracles*

Unlike *GP* and *Ísls*, *GJtb* and the fourteenth-century sagas contain a significant number of "first aid"/rescue miracle stories that involve restoring health or even resuscitation. In many cases the beneficiaries are domestic animals, which includes this type of miracle in the same category as the "provision of food" miracles, as in the majority of cases the animals rescued are domestic animals that were kept for meat, milk, skins, etc.

From the period 1185–1203:

- healing Kolbeinn Tumason's ram
- healing Kolbeinn Árnorsson's cow
- putting an end to a plague at Skúmsstaðir

the Quarters, the bishop is required to visit every established commune so that people may meet him [...] The householder who gives the bishop lodging is to provide him with horses on the day he leaves. His serving men and neighbours are required to lend the bishop horses if the householder asks them to do so. The man who refuses is fined three marks if he has a horse to lend (K, p. 19).' (The English translation is based on *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás*, trans. by A. Dennis and others, 2 vols (Winnipeg, 1980), I.

¹⁰⁶ It is difficult to interpret the accusation in detail as two sources put it in a different way: "leti eta slattr tvímælt föstv daga álslandi" (*GB*, ch. 98), "orlofar tvímælt kjöt á föstudaga í biskupsdæmi þínu" (*GD*, ch. 48).

Posthumous:

- healing Börkr Álason’s horse (he was a *heimamaðr* at Sauðafell)¹⁰⁷
- providing priest Hrafn’s cow with some extra strength¹⁰⁸
- healing Einarr Andrésson’s ram¹⁰⁹
- finding Sigurðr Vigfússon’s lamb¹¹⁰
- healing Þorsteinn from Hlýskógur’s cow¹¹¹
- healing a horse belonging to a man named Steinólfr¹¹²
- healing Ívarr Benteinsson’s cow¹¹³
- healing an anonymous priest’s horse (in the south of Iceland)¹¹⁴

It is hardly possible to establish a precise date and time of all those incidents or the location since the majority of the individuals are unknown elsewhere in the written material. Except for the first three stories (relatively detailed and explicitly presented as facts from Guðmundr’s life), all of the events are recorded in the younger sources. Since in the other sources Guðmundr is referred to as the bishop or the holy bishop, we may exclude the authorial attempts at describing the twelfth-century conditions, mainly in the northern, north-western/western parts of the country. As far as the personal and place names are concerned, it can be stated that average Icelanders benefited from Guðmundr’s help, which would, naturally, contribute to the image of him being the ally of those who had very little.

Guðmundr’s “goodness” was often taken for granted and the intentions with which people approached the saint were not always quite noble. A lot of stories are the “chastisement” type stories. The best example here is the case of the boy who wished to receive new clothes and lied to the bishop about not having anything to wear.¹¹⁵ Guðmundr reprimanded him, but provided him with twelve ells of homespun cloth. He did so on behalf of the Virgin Mary whom the child also initially addressed, knowing about Guðmundr’s devotion to

¹⁰⁷ *GJtb*, ch. 22; *GB*, ch. 136; *GD*, ch. 86.

¹⁰⁸ *GJtb*, ch. 30; *GB*, ch. 144a.

¹⁰⁹ *GJtb*, ch. 31; *GB*, ch. 144c.

¹¹⁰ *GJtb*, ch. 32; *GB*, ch. 144d.

¹¹¹ *GJtb*, ch. 33; *GB*, ch. 144g.

¹¹² *GJtb*, ch. 35; *GB*, ch. 144a; *GD*, ch. 86.

¹¹³ *GJtb*, ch. 38; *GB*, ch. 145g.

¹¹⁴ *GD*, *Viðbætir*.

¹¹⁵ See 6.1. above.

her. A few stories focus on the importance of and, at the same time, on human inability to trust the bishop completely: Böðvarr Þórðarson, the farmer in Borgarfjörður, troubled by a fox, needed punishment before he left the solution of his problem entirely to Guðmundr, or rather, to God via the saint. The bishop demanded the best sheep for himself and his men in order to try the man's good will and trust: Böðvarr refused and on the following night his best sheep were killed by the fox. On the following day the farmer humbly asked Guðmundr for help. The bishop held a service during which he excommunicated the fox. The animal was found dead and Böðvarr's precious flock was never bothered again.¹¹⁶

The aforementioned accusation of greed which Þorsteinn Praslaugarson issued against Guðmundr when he was still a priest became much more frequent in the years 1203–37: that is during his episcopacy. This issue predominates the miracle stories, and any arguments concerning theological matters appear to be virtually non-existent. Guðmundr's use of relics which was initially controversial to many was no longer in focus (beside the incident when they were taken away by Guðmundr from the church at Möðruvellir, which was perceived by Sigurðr Ormsson as theft). Money and food became the matter of dispute and the means to demonstrate the divine power which the saint was able to operate. The image of Guðmundr as the provider of material help is clear in the sagas, even though the context often indicates that the saint was only the tool of divine intervention or that his methods met with criticism and doubt. The number of rescue and provision miracles is exceptional in the material concerning this particular saint and they do mirror the difficult living conditions in Iceland at the time when the sagas were written down.

7.4. *Severe living conditions and the need for a miracle*

A posthumous apparition has been recorded by Arngrímr, in which a deceased priest introduced as Simon, "Bishop Guðmundr's disciple and blood relative", appeared to a certain anonymous man a few years

¹¹⁶ *GJtb*, ch. 3; *GB*, ch. 117; *GD*, chs. 65 and 66.

after the bishop's death.¹¹⁷ The man started their conversation by asking about his “master and spiritual father”, Bishop Guðmundr. The priest revealed that Guðmundr was the dearest friend of God and all those who had been around the bishop during his life enjoyed a special blessing “for his almsgiving, prayers, holy and chaste life were like the precious incense to God”.¹¹⁸ Therefore, nobody needed to ask whether Guðmundr was in heaven as his acts of healing and other good deeds which he was able to work with God's blessing, were known all over Iceland.

The final message conveyed in the dream concerned almsgiving. Each person who wished to offer some alms to Guðmundr or the Virgin Mary should feed the poor every Saturday. The recipient of the dream/apparition received the order to deliver the message to as many as possible (although the narrative does not list any other individuals who did; presumably the author meant that he would also mediate the message via recording it in his text). Once again Guðmundr's generosity and charity is underlined. And although his virtue certainly is perceived as a product of the grace of God working in human will, it cannot be said that it is “no longer lauded as a social ideal with the power to perfect human character”.¹¹⁹ Charity and generosity are certainly presented as virtues which can and should be practiced by any human being; both to perfect their own character (and, possibly, turn them into saints since, after all, the saints were supposed to be the right examples to imitate) and to serve their society. The importance of almsgiving is presented as a complementary activity to Guðmundr's miracles of the “food provision” type. How crucial was the issue for Icelanders in the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries?

In her article from 1991 Astrid E.J. Ogilvie examines the reliability of the contemporary written sources (such as *Sturlunga saga* collection or the sagas of the bishops) and their usefulness in the analysis of climatic changes in medieval Iceland.¹²⁰ Although many

¹¹⁷ “vígsluson ok kjötligr frændi herra Guðmundar byskups” (GD, ch. 78). *Vígsluson* should probably be interpreted in this context as a cleric ordained by Guðmundr. Another meaning could be “godson”.

¹¹⁸ “Hans ölmusur ok píslarvætti með heilagri bæn ok hreinlífi steig upp hátt í augliti drottins, sem þat reykelsi” (GD, ch. 78).

¹¹⁹ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 155.

¹²⁰ Astrid E.J. Ogilvie, ‘Climatic changes in Iceland A.D. c. 865 to 1598’, in *The Norse of the North Atlantic*. Acta Archaeologica, 61, ed. by Gerald F. Bigelow (Copenhagen, Munksgaard, 1991), 233–51.

are in principle considered unreliable because of their hagiographic nature, Ogilvie draws attention to certain passages and the sources she quotes most often are, actually, the main sources on Guðmundr Arason's life. The annalistic records are, as the author claims, "one of the most important sources of climate information in Iceland from the late twelfth century to c. 1430".¹²¹ Both the information on bad seasons in the annals and the sagas corresponds with the palaeoglaciological data.¹²²

According to sagas (such as *GP* and *Ísls*) and annals, several difficult years had already been reported in the 1180s (north of Iceland, possibly also south), thus, shortly before and at the beginning of the saint's priestly career (1185).¹²³ A few severe seasons are recorded and dated to the 1190s, and both the *translatio* of Þorlákr and that of Jón were put in that context. It is hardly a coincidence that the written sources portray the "co-operation" of all the Icelandic saints to obtain help for their countrymen (especially Jón and Guðmundr, which suggests a more difficult situation in the north of the country). Both Þorlákr and Jón appeared in dreams to random people and suggested that the *translatio* of their bones would improve the weather.¹²⁴ Guðmundr, who actively participated in both events, acted differently. Instead of improving the bad weather he dealt later with the results of it.

The fourteenth century is exceptional when it comes to the amount of information about climate and weather which is available.¹²⁵ None of the sagas, annals or any other written source suggests that Guðmundr was called upon in the times of long lasting bad weather or bad seasons. Nor is the 1315 *translatio* of his bones or the act of washing

¹²¹ Ogilvie, 'Climatic changes', p. 235.

¹²² Astrid E.J. Ogilvie and T. Jónsson, "'Little Ice Age' research: a perspective from Iceland", *Climatic change*, 48 (2001), 9–52, p. 26; Severe ice-years are documented in 1145, 1233, 1261, 1275, 1306, 1320, 1321 and 1374, see Fig 2. on p. 31.

¹²³ Ogilvie, 'Climatic changes', p. 240.

¹²⁴ See 3.4. above.

¹²⁵ It began with the eruption of Hekla (*Annal* II, III, IV, V, VII and VIII). The dearth which took place in the north in the summer of 1300 was most probably caused by the ash-fall from this eruption. Numerous disasters happened during the first decade, such as epidemics and earthquakes. *Annals* IV, V and VIII mention "Sea ice all summer in the north". *Annal* II mentions an epidemic and mortality in the south instead. As Ogilvie has observed, "from this data it is impossible to state in which areas exactly the situation was worst, although northern and western parts seem to have been most affected (though the characteristics of the sources must be borne in mind, for example *Flateyannáll* is certainly more focused on northern Iceland)" (Ogilvie, 'Climatic changes', p. 242).

them in 1344 referred to as “remedies” against weather phenomena unlike the translations of Jón or Þorlákr. A votive letter by Bishop Jón Eiríksson *skalli* and the northerners from 2 February 1365 is a hope for relief from the prevailing severe winter and a promise that they would henceforth observe the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary.¹²⁶ The vow was made to the Virgin Mary, Jón of Hólar, Guðmundr *góði* and all the saints, and the letter also contains a passage suggesting that another similar vow had been made earlier. In two annal entries dated to 1370–76 (VII) and 1375–79 (IX) a vow on behalf of the bishop and the northerners is mentioned, the reason being a hard winter. In return for the favour, Jón Eiríksson expressed the intention of applying to the pope (possibly Urban V, as mentioned above) for the recognition of Guðmundr Arason’s sainthood. The reasons for those invocations might be various. Since Jón Ögmundarson was known for helping the inhabitants of the northern quarter or the Hólar bishoprics in times of bad weather, calling on his follower and a holy man recently translated was worth trying.

In hagiographic material goods circulate according to evangelical principles: the poor are taken care of and the generous poor who want to share their small possessions with others in need are rewarded with twice (or more) as much. One of the basic principles of Christianity about which the bishop reminded the clerics, who were sceptical about sharing a silver bowl/chalice among three beggars, was seeing Christ in every poor man. Those who shared, shared with God, the Virgin Mary, or saints. In a strikingly similar story from *Gregorius saga* an angel in disguise visited the generous clergyman, who did not hesitate to give him a silver plate.¹²⁷ St. Martin shared his cloak with a man not knowing it was Christ himself.¹²⁸ As presented above, the stories that reportedly took place during Guðmundr Arason’s priesthood and episcopacy are constructed according to the same principle: those who were willing to share and who trusted God by trusting the saint regardless of their difficult situation were rewarded with both spiritual and material gain.

After Guðmundr’s death the mechanism of mutual help extended: beside the direct contact between saint and believer, an indirect link

¹²⁶ *DI* III, 174.

¹²⁷ *Gregorius saga*, chs. 3. and 12.

¹²⁸ *Martinus saga byskups* I, ch. 2.

appeared from saint to the believer via the poor/needy. The vows in the sources concerning Guðmundr show the predominance of the donations for the poor (usually in kind: fish, meat or milk) in different types of cases. A few times only “alms” are mentioned.¹²⁹ Wax is offered in four different cases, the biggest amount being worth one *mörk*,¹³⁰ homespun cloth—in one case, worth one *eyrir*.¹³¹ There are also a few cases in which it is noted that a vow has been made, but not specified what it was, for instance that people have offered *nökurra hluti, söngum nökkurum, nökkurum peningum* or *mörgum smáhlutum*.¹³² Beside material offerings mentioned above, the “spiritual” gifts accompany the material ones which are predominant in the posthumous material; of twenty-seven cases three mention specifically only prayers and keeping Guðmundr’s day holy.¹³³

In comparison with Guðmundr, Þorlákr seems to have received wealthier gifts and his devotees were more concerned about the needy, while Jón’s list is also rather modest.¹³⁴

Jón:

- unspecified material offering or offering of cattle/sheep (*féggjöf*)
- calf
- sheep
- milk for the needy (from one cow)
- candle
- a mark of wax
- half of an English coin (“hálfan enskan penning”)

¹²⁹ The case of a lost lamb, injured leg and the second *vatnormr* case. Þorgerðr gave alms to some of Guðmundr’s relatives when her child was finally born completely healthy (*GJtb*, ch. 37; *GB*, ch. 145d). See Appendix 1.

¹³⁰ Relatively close, however, in time: *GJtb*, ch. 37; *GB*, ch. 145d; *GJtb*, ch. 38; *GB*, ch. 145e and *GJtb*, ch. 38; *GB*, ch. 145f, only one case is from the youngest source: *GD*, ch. 80. The weight being one *eyrir*, three *aurar* or one *mörk*. One *eyrir* (pl. *aurar*) equals six ells (*álnir*), one mark equals eight *aurar* and one hundred is 120 ells (for a detailed discussion see Björn Þorsteinsson and Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, ‘Norska öldin’, pp. 131–42).

¹³¹ *GD*, ch. 83, one *eyrir*.

¹³² In three cases noted one after another only the act of making a vow is noted: *GJtb*, ch. 34; *GJtb*, ch. 35; *GB*, ch. 145a and *GJtb*, ch. 35; *GB*, ch. 145 b and *GD*, ch. 81.

¹³³ For the ‘resurrection’ of his son the priest Ljótr whose case is discussed below, vowed “halda heilagt ártíðardag hans [Guðmundar] meðan hann lifði, ok gera þá jafnan nökkura hluti fyrir hans nafn” (*GJtb*, ch. 25; *GB*, ch. 139; *GD*, ch. 89), it might be assumed that almsgiving or some other material offerings would be included.

¹³⁴ The list below is composed on the basis of the miracle stories from *JS*, *ÞA*, *ÞB*, *ÞC*, *ÞE*, *ÞJtb* I and *ÞJtb* II.

Þorlákr:

- half a horse
- seal
- *féggjöf*
- votive cattle/sheep (*heitfé*)
- candle
- candle worth eight ells
- twenty four marks of wax
- six marks of wax
- one mark of wax
- two *aurar* of wax
- one *eyrir* of wax
- twelve ells of home-spun cloth
- a hundred of home-spun cloth
- six ells of home-spun cloth
- six *aurar* of home-spun cloth
- a handful of flour
- half a mark
- half an *eyrir*
- money/coin (*penning*)
- meals

The fact that the “payment” for the miracles attributed to Þorlákr is so high in comparison to that offered for Jón’s or Guðmundr’s miracles may have had different reasons: the generosity or wealth of the beneficiaries, the popularity of the saint or a different type of saintliness, dictated (among others) by socio-political circumstances. During the thirteenth century offerings in kind became the norm. Another popular element in the vows was the promise to perform charitable works. In Iceland the offering in kind was increasingly frequently accompanied by the promise of a charitable deed.¹³⁵ It is difficult to establish whether there existed any specific rules as far as the “proper” offering is concerned; in my view the process of vow making depended largely on the conscience of the supplicants and their material status. Any patterns in the relation between certain type of “payment” and certain type of case are impossible to establish, the most common case being a curative miracle, but often the same kind of problem is dealt with in

¹³⁵ That being a general tendency in the fourteenth century Iceland is mentioned in Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 53.

different ways.¹³⁶ The miracle stories concerning Jón and Þorlákr do not reveal any patterns of that kind either. It seems that the vernacular Icelandic stories did not differ much from those composed in continental Europe where around 1300 the relationship between the faithful and the saints became more personalized in devotion, and sometimes acquired a new affective dimension.¹³⁷ In a few stories it is stated rather clearly that the supplicant offered what he/she considered appropriate: Sigurður Vigfússon vowed to give alms on Guðmundr's feast, "ones that seemed proper to him",¹³⁸ and a woman from the West Fjords suffering from a *vatnornmr* offered "what she considered worth offering".¹³⁹ An interesting story is the aforementioned case of the parents whose baby slipped out of their hands and drowned in the river they were crossing on the way to the church where they were going to have the baby baptised. As Arngrímur himself notices, the parents were too devastated to make a vow. They only prayed and the baby was found alive and healthy on the following day.¹⁴⁰

Almost every *vita* of a holy bishop contains a remark on his charity. *Heilagra Manna Sögur* as well as the sagas of the native bishops confirm it, and the *vitae* of the holy Icelandic bishops are rich in charitable deeds. Þorlákr, according to his *vita*, was very much concerned about the poor.¹⁴¹ He provided them with clothes and food, and before the most important Church holidays he would call on some of the poor (twelve, nine or seven—particular variants mention different numbers), wash their feet and dry them with his own hair. Each of the needy would receive some good alms before returning home. Þorlákr's miracles for the poor are nearly as numerous as Guðmundr's, and bad seasons are mentioned several times.¹⁴² The provision of food seems

¹³⁶ For the successful outcome of a difficult childbirth a mass for the souls of Bishop Guðmundr's parents and a donation of ten marks of fish for the poor (*GJtb*, ch. 29; *GB*, ch. 143) was vowed. Another time, while facing a similar problem, people vowed to fast on water on the day on the eve of Guðmundr's day, giving meals [to the poor] and keeping the day holy for their whole lifetime. In addition to that the mother promised to order a mass for the soul (it is unclear for whose soul, as it is only stated that she would "láta syngja sálumessu") and give an eyrir of wax (*GJtb*, ch. 37; *GB*, ch. 145d) presumably to the church of Hólar.

¹³⁷ Vauchez, *Sainthood in the later Middle Ages*, p. 476.

¹³⁸ "[...] slíka sem honum sýndist" (*GJtb*, ch. 32; *GB*, ch. 144d).

¹³⁹ "sem hennar [...] mætti vel offra" (*GD*, ch. 83). The word *vatnornmr* is rather problematic; the author must have meant some type of insect living in still water.

¹⁴⁰ See 6.1. above.

¹⁴¹ *ÞA*, ch. 14; *ÞB*, ch. 18.

¹⁴² *ÞA*, chs. 33–5, 65–71 and 96 or *ÞJtb* I, ch. 5.

to be less frequent than, for instance, curative miracles, but is, nevertheless, present: the bishop provided poor people with exceptional amount of fish,¹⁴³ a stranded whale¹⁴⁴ or a seal,¹⁴⁵ plus he healed a cow¹⁴⁶ and a sheep.¹⁴⁷ Þorlákr's relative, apparently a poor young man, is also listed among the needy suffering hunger.¹⁴⁸ All those miracles are posthumous.

Jón Ögmundarson might at first be considered a serious competition for Guðmundr. The author/s of *Jóns saga ins helga* called him *sannr faðir allra fátæka manna*. According to the saga/s, Jón took great care of widows and orphans, and no human being who needed help would part from him without receiving it. What is more, he appointed people at Hólar who were supposed to regularly take care of the poor, and the bishop himself offered his help to all those who needed it.¹⁴⁹ Þorlákr's miracles for the poor are all posthumous while one of Jón's miracles is *in vita*.¹⁵⁰ Female recipients are predominant, in general the individuals concerned seem to be random and poverty is explicitly confirmed in a very few cases (bad seasons even more rarely). The number of miracles as such is scarce, and the vows/offerings very modest in comparison to those offered to Þorlákr and Guðmundr. Different reasons could be taken into consideration here, but since the author clearly suggested that Jón was a good manager of the see, the text(s) might have been written with the intention of showing Jón as a bishop who took such good care of his diocese before and after death that few needed his help.¹⁵¹ Beggars and vagrants are not mentioned anywhere in the texts about Þorlákr and Jón (with one exception: ch. 63 in *Jóns saga*). The author of *GB* writes,

[...] eigi mvn finnaz sa madr her aIslandi nema hin helgi Þorlacr byskvp ok iN sæli Ion byskvp at slíkr hafi verit igæskv við fatæka menn ok

¹⁴³ *ÞA*, chs. 33–5.

¹⁴⁴ *ÞA*, chs. 65–71.

¹⁴⁵ *ÞA*, chs. 65–71 and *ÞJtb* I, ch. 22.

¹⁴⁶ *ÞA*, chs. 65–71.

¹⁴⁷ *ÞA*, chs. 33–5.

¹⁴⁸ *ÞJtb* I, ch. 37.

¹⁴⁹ “Huggaði hann ekkjur ok föðurlausa, ok engi kom svá harmþruginn á hans fund at eigi fengi á nokkurn veg huggan af hans tilstilli”, pp. 213–5.

¹⁵⁰ The bishop gave a poor woman some cheese from his supplies, but the amount remained the same as if nothing had been given away (*JS*, ch. 18).

¹⁵¹ However, since charity played a significant part in any holy prelate's *vita*, the borrowing of the motif cannot be excluded. It is present e.g. in *Gregorius saga*: “Hann var sem fadir væri öllum fatækum mönnum” (*Gregorius saga*, ch. 11).

hardlifi við sialfan sig. Ok þat skal ek mæla lægingarlaust ollvm gyðs vinvm at ek hyG G(vdmvnd) byskvp haftt hafa flestra þeira mannkosti isinv lifi.¹⁵²

Similar passages are also to be found in the sagas concerning other Icelandic bishops, also those who never gained the status of saints, such as Árni Þorláksson.¹⁵³ The respect for Guðmundr's saintliness and faith in his superior ability to support those in need are central in the fourteenth-century narratives about him. Drawing a parallel between his experience of "exile" and of harsh living conditions and difficult life situation of those he helped is a metaphor. The narratives do not contain any remarks on Guðmundr's suffering from lack of food or clothing, quite the opposite: thanks to the support of many well-to-do laymen he survived the difficult years quite well. His experience was not entirely identical with that of an average beneficiary. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that he experienced more harsh treatment than Jón and Þorlákr during the periods of his exile from Hólar, and this, according to the author of *GB*, made him slightly more equal to all the people who also had to rely on the mercy of others. As the passage suggests, Guðmundr's experience enabled him to understand the situation of those in need better than Jón or Þorlákr.

7.5. *The support for the poorest in documentary material*

Arngrímr Brandsson claims that before his death Guðmundr took care of the needy in a particular way: "Hér með gerir hann sitt testamentum at fátækra manna sið, ok dæmi sjálfs græðarans, þat er at skipta klæðum sínunni miðil sinna manna".¹⁵⁴

To the poor, as Arngrímr reports, Guðmundr's death was a disaster. The bishop has been presented by him as *fátækra faðir*, *volaðra viðrhjálpr* as well as *faðir föðurlausra*, *huggan harmþrúnginna*, *snauðra ok sælla*. The author writes that the saint would keep supporting the poor with alms after his death as generously as he did during his life,

¹⁵² "There is no man in Iceland except for holy Bishop Þorlákr and blessed Bishop Jón who would be so kind with poor people and hard on himself. And with full respect for all God's friends, I must admit that I think Bishop Guðmundr had most of those qualities in his life" (*GB*, ch. 102).

¹⁵³ 'Svá greindi hann um aðrar ölmusur [...]' *Árna saga*, ch. 38.

¹⁵⁴ "He makes his will the way poor people do, and according to the example of the Saviour Himself, by dividing his clothes among his people" (*GD*, ch. 72).

whenever they asked for help in the name of Guðmundr.¹⁵⁵ This comment might both mean Guðmundr’s posthumous help in the form of miracles and other people’s generosity in the name of the good bishop. In the closing chapter of *GD* Guðmundr’s goodness and generosity is praised in a scene in which he criticised the unpopular Norwegian Bishop Bótólfr (bp. 1238–47) for his interest in leisure and lack of eagerness to serve God as Guðmundr did. *GD* focuses on the idea of Guðmundr as “the father of the poor” more than any other narrative. In all the fourteenth-century narratives on Guðmundr the problem of charity, almsgiving and support for the poorest is developed and carefully inserted throughout the text. Did his legacy become tradition?

The extant documentary evidence from both the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries shows that the poor were very much in focus and that such issues as the tithe, the donation of food, their share of stranded whales and debts were frequently discussed in numerous law codes and statutes from the second half of the thirteenth century onwards. The issue of support for the poor was also included in the *staðamál* as the matters that should be submitted to clerical supervision.¹⁵⁶ King Hákon’s letter dated to 1305 criticized Bishop Jörundr Þorsteinsson (bp. 1267–1313) for taking the poor people’s share of whale in Skagafjörður.¹⁵⁷ Despite the fact that the bishop had followed Árni Þorláksson’s Christian Law, the king supported the northern farmers who had turned to him, and warned Jörundr about the consequences of insubordination as “it is wrong for anyone to steal from the poor, and exceptionally wrong if the leader of the Holy Church does it”.¹⁵⁸ Whether the matter was positively resolved is not certain as no evidence exists that could confirm it. However, a similar issue is referred to in a letter written by King Magnús Eiríksson (k. of Sweden 8 July 1319–February 1364, k. of Norway August 1319–1343) during the episcopacy of Jörundr’s successor at Hólar, Auðunn Þorbergsson. The king mentions “bishops” who “intended to take and have taken a share of fish and whale caught and moved to the coast on holy days as well as all the tithe worth less than an *eyri*/ounce that belonged to the

¹⁵⁵ “[...] eigi síðr andaðr en lifandi stendr hann í ölmusugerðum til beggja handa, þá er öreiginn þiggr fyrir hans blessaða nafn” (*GD*, ch. 72).

¹⁵⁶ See *DI* II, 79. and 86.–100.

¹⁵⁷ *DI* II, 183. (1305).

¹⁵⁸ “Þat berr öllum illa at ræna fataþka menn, en allra verst forstiornarmanni heilagrar kristni” (*DI* II, 183.). In case of refusal, the bishop would be fined an equal amount of his goods.

poor".¹⁵⁹ Once again the maintenance of the old law was underlined and the bishop reprimanded.

It has been argued that the Church played little significant role in arranging help for the needy in the Commonwealth period.¹⁶⁰ Certainly, a well organized system such as that established by Benedictine monasteries elsewhere in Europe or represented by the presence of hospices and hospitals is difficult to find in medieval Iceland. Nevertheless, the donation of food or homespun cloth to the poor and almsgiving is present in *máldagar* from the beginnings of the thirteenth century. Another issue frequently referred to is that of their burial, many of the inventory books containing a passage saying that a resting place was guaranteed there for the poor from the entire area.¹⁶¹ The fact that almsgiving was crucial for the salvation of the soul was already well known in Iceland at the time of Guðmundr Arason's priesthood. Archbishop Eiríkr Ívarsson (abp. 1188–1205) recommended prayers and almsgiving as a means of repentance in the letter to the Icelandic bishops from 1189.¹⁶² Ten years later, shortly before the election of Guðmundr as the bishop of Hólar, Pope Innocent III (p. 1198–1216) issued a letter to the chieftains and other laymen in Iceland to remind them about obedience to the Church leaders and almsgiving.¹⁶³ The relation between the power of the clergy and material help for the needy was obvious: it drew both rich and poor to the churches and provided them with means as well as prestige.

Several *máldagar* include some detailed information on the donors of the land or other goods, like the woman named Ása Eiríksdóttir, the owner of Svalbarð in Svalbarðsströnd. The church in Svalbarð, according to the inventory book from around 1394 (or later), had the image of Guðmundr Arason:¹⁶⁴

sagde asa at þar atti af at lukazst arliga fataekum monnum firer sal
maghnusar artidar dagh hans tuitug vað.vætt matar.þrir fiordungar fiska

¹⁵⁹ *DI* II, 342. (10 June 1320).

¹⁶⁰ Gerhold, *Armut und Armenfürsorge*, pp. 131–3.

¹⁶¹ *DI* I, 149. (1258, Akrar at Mýrar, also *DI* III, 48. ((1354) and *Vilchinsmáldagi*); *DI* II, 192. (Sæbol at Ingjaldssandur in Ísafjarðarsýsla), 209. (1313, Nes in Selvogur, also mentioned in *Vilchinsmáldagi*), 482. (1340, Dýrhólmar in Mýrdalur).

¹⁶² *DI* I, 71. "En ef madr ma eigi eiga lag vit konv sina. þa verður þat anad huortt med. giorningvm. eda med. kynfylgiv spelle. En ef med. giorningv, er. þa verður at hialpa lata. med. bænvvm og olmosv giordvm vit gud og ef þat stoðar. þa er uel."

¹⁶³ *DI* I, 77. (30 July 1198).

¹⁶⁴ *Pétrsmáldagar*. The church patron was John the Apostle.

oc lata syngja salutidir oc salumesso.taka olmosu man ath langa fostu oc fæda fram ifuer paska viku.¹⁶⁵

This is, however, the only example of that kind where one might associate the image of the saint and the charitable acts. Moreover, it would be misleading to think that the practice was commonly associated with Guðmundr as nothing in the extant evidence suggests that. In *Vilchinsmáldagi* there are several entries of that kind: at Kolbeinsstaðir in Hnappadalssýsla twelve ells were supposed to be given to the poor for the soul of a man named Kjetill on his birthday and another twelve for a woman named Una (most probably his wife) on her birthday.¹⁶⁶ Þorkell Ásbjarnarson at Hofteigur in Jökuldalur and Óláfr Jónsson in Möðrudalur in Fjöll each offered each a cow to the church, in order to provide the local poor with help (the former also provided specifically for the poorest member of his kin once a year).¹⁶⁷ Similar entries are to be found in wills from around the same time, a type of document that seems to have developed in Iceland in the fourteenth century (or is better documented by that date). The donations made by Einarr Þorláksson (the brother of the king’s retainer named Ketill),¹⁶⁸ Einarr Eiríksson from Vatnsfjörður¹⁶⁹ and Þorstein Eyjólfsson (lawman)¹⁷⁰ are rather generous reflecting the prominent positions they held. A few of the entries mention a specific saint. Those that do, refer to Þorlákr: Ólafur Jónsson chose Þorlákr’s Mass (23 December) for the time of his offerings, Þorsteinn Eyjólfsson gave five *kúgildi* to “holy Þorlákr and

¹⁶⁵ “Ása said that for the salvation of Magnús’s soul a service should be held and the poor should receive two meals composed of three quarters of fish each year on the anniversary of his death. People begging for alms should also be taken in during Lent and maintained [provided with food] throughout the Easter Week”, *DI* III, 380. (23 August 1390). The man concerned is probably Ása’s grandfather, Magnús Brandsson, mentioned in the will as a donor of thirteen *kúgildi*.

¹⁶⁶ They are mentioned earlier in the document as the donors of land to the church (possibly Hegstaðir). As for the church patrons, the *máldagi* says: “Nichulaskirkja a Kolbeinstodum er helgud Gudi oc Gudz modur Mariæ. Petro postula. Magno. Nichulao. Dominico. Katerinæ oc ollum Helgumm” (*Vilchinsmáldagi*, p. 180).

¹⁶⁷ “[...] þar skal lvkast af olmusa a hverium xij manudum fatækum manni þeim er þurftugastur være j hans ætt” (*Vilchinsmáldagi*, p. 214. The church’s patron saint is the Virgin Mary). A similar case is also noted in *DI* II, 405. (1331, Hróni in Hrunamannahreppur in Árnessýsla) where the member of certain Arnsteinn’s kin who is in the greatest debt was allowed to donate two marks of it to the poor, repeated in *Vilchinsmáldagi*, p. 42. For the Möðrudalur entry see *Vilchinsmáldagi*, p. 215.

¹⁶⁸ *DI* VI, 13. (14 January 1362), the monastery of Helgafell.

¹⁶⁹ *DI* III, 314. (5 April 1383), the church dedicated to Óláfr.

¹⁷⁰ *DI* III, 336. (12 June 1386), Hólar cathedral.

the church at Skálholt". In addition to that, in 1340 a couple donated a quarter of an estate to "the holy Apostle Peter and the holy Bishop Þorlákr"¹⁷¹ and Pétur's *máldagi* mentions that the church at Spákonufell would receive a dependant on Þorlákr's Mass in December and support him during Christmas, Easter Week and Whit week.¹⁷² Otherwise there seems to be no relationship between the frequency or character of the offerings and the patron saint of the churches where the donations were made.

Such entries are rather late and certain regularities may be observed: as far as *máldagar* are concerned, some remarks on material help for the needy appear at the beginning of the thirteenth century and seem to disappear around the 1260s, and it is tempting to assume that the *staðamál* caused certain disruption. Such remarks appear again at the beginning of the fourteenth century and continue with a great frequency throughout the decades. The issue of burial occurs slightly more frequently in the thirteenth and in the first half of the fourteenth century, while regular material help and alms dominate the second half of the fourteenth century, when significant donations in wills are also observed. Not without a reason did the Church Law by Árni Þorláksson instruct believers about making a will.¹⁷³ The bishop strongly advised alms and prayers in his statute from September 1269. The issue appeared also in those signed by the Archbishop Eilífr (abp. 1309–31) and Jón Sigurðarson (1323–48),¹⁷⁴ Archbishop Páll (abp. 1333–46), the letter from August 1342,¹⁷⁵ and another one by Jón Sigurðarson (26 July 1345).¹⁷⁶ Interestingly enough, no more than one document that confirmed the activity/initiative of the bishops of Hólar in that field has survived.¹⁷⁷ The followers of Guðmundr Arason did not contribute much to the improvement of the situation of the poor people in the bishopric. Another pattern observed in the documentary material is the lack of any specific form of support of the needy (*fátækir*, *ómagar* or *þurfamenn*) in the inventories of the monasteries or the cathedral

¹⁷¹ *DI* II, 475.

¹⁷² *DI* III, 419–98.

¹⁷³ *DI* II, 100.

¹⁷⁴ *DI* II, 355.

¹⁷⁵ *DI* II, 487.

¹⁷⁶ *DI* II, 513.

¹⁷⁷ *DI* II, 484. (30 April 1341), the bishop whose name the document mentions is Egill Eyjólfsson (1332–1341).

church.¹⁷⁸ The situation of the northern and northwestern parts of Iceland seems to be rather peculiar as far as that aspect is concerned as, with a few exceptions, the majority of donations and almsgiving is recorded in the *máldagar* from the southern, south-western or south-eastern parts of the country.¹⁷⁹ The palaeoglaciological data that confirms the information provided by the annals and the sagas might be perceived as a proof for the general worsening of living conditions in Iceland in the thirteenth, but especially in the fourteenth, century. Did the difficult living conditions inspire the saga authors to create the image of Guðmundr as “The Father of the Poor”? Probably so. The northern and northwestern parts of the country seem to have been affected more severely than the rest of Iceland. Although the conflict between Guðmundr and certain chieftains developed for other reasons, the issue of a regular support of the needy certainly played a significant role in it at the beginning of his episcopacy. It became the predominant motif in the bishop’s journeys around the country and one of the crucial issues in the conflicts between the northerners and Guðmundr’s Norwegian successors at Hólar.

The exact amount of wealth of the Hólar cathedral or the entire bishopric during the thirteenth or fourteenth century, is difficult to assess. Only two extant inventory books that list the cathedral’s possessions are available, both dated to the end of the fourteenth century.¹⁸⁰ If more such inventories existed from both Skálholt and Hólar, the comparison and some general conclusions would be possible to make. However, the lists present a wide range of rather valuable objects and it does not seem that the see itself was impoverished. Other documents, also dated to the end of the fourteenth century, show that at least Hólar had the means to support the estate and to employ a reasonably large group of people.¹⁸¹ There are also a number of documents that provide information on the purchase of land (buying,

¹⁷⁸ The exception is “Skrá um reka Hólastaðar og Möðruvallaklaustrs og reka Sighvats Hálfðánarsonar á Grund með norðströndum” (*DI* II, 161. dated to 1296).

¹⁷⁹ The earliest entries for northern Iceland seem to be those dated to 1318 (*Auðunarmáldagi*), the number is significantly bigger in the second half of the fourteenth century. Four entries documenting the purchase of land dated to the end of the fourteenth century are from the northern bishoprics (*DI* III, 388., 400., 510. and 519.).

¹⁸⁰ *DI* III, 235. (1 October 1374) and 511. (2 May 1396).

¹⁸¹ *DI* III, 351. (1387), 352. (1388), 353. (1388), 354. (1388), 363. (1389) and 364. (1389).

selling and giving) and other transactions in which the bishops of Hólar were involved throughout the fourteenth century.¹⁸² The reliability of those documents is dubious and the dating certainly questionable, but otherwise nothing indicates that the situation of the see was critical in that period.

Nowhere in the documentary or narrative material is it suggested that Guðmundr Arason had any intention of issuing law codes or documents of that kind, or any documents that would secure the situation of the poor in Iceland. His forced absence at Hólar and the conflicts with certain chieftains made any attempt at composing and putting such regulations down in writing impossible. Arngrímur's suggestion that a *testamentum* was made by the saint on his deathbed might have been influenced by the growing tendency to compose (preserve) documents of that kind. However, in this particular case the bishop's wish that other clergymen follow his example must be the "will" left by him, and not an actual document. Nevertheless, the Icelandic saint whose feast was the most frequently commemorated with almsgiving was Þorlákr,¹⁸³ which can be deduced from the evidence preserved in the *máldagar* as well as the miracle stories (nearly as rich in the "provision of food" incidents as those in *Guðmundar sögur*). Since Þorlákr's cult developed rather dynamically, the arrangement and the documentation of the almsgiving was not problematic. As mentioned before, every holy prelate was supposed to practice charity and care for the poor. Being the first local saint, with the reputation of an ascetic who had fought for the rights of the Church, Þorlákr was much more likely to become the official saintly institution that might help the poor.

The fourteenth-century variants of Guðmundr's *vita* which elaborate on the image of Guðmundr as "the father of the poor" do not necessarily reflect Guðmundr's actual popularity among the faithful. GA was written in 1320s and the charters do not reveal any extensive almsgiving or any type of donations that would commemorate Guðmundr's charity throughout the fourteenth century or even later.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² The first one being *DI* II, 363. (1326).

¹⁸³ E.g. *DI* II, 217. (Eyjólfstaðir in Vellir), *Vilchinsmáldagi* (Möðrudalur on Fjall); a pound of food or an eyrir of homespun cloth. It is, however, hard to assume whether the fact is a pure coincidence or illustrates the saint's popularity.

¹⁸⁴ The analysis of Guðmundr's cult in the fifteenth century and in the pre-reformation years is yet to be done. Nevertheless the documentary evidence does not mention Guðmundr exclusively in association with almsgiving or donations for the poor. His name is usually mentioned together with the names of other saints,

Regardless of the poor reliability of *máldagar* as a source material, it is safe to assume that *staðamál* and the conflicts in the north during Guðmundr’s episcopacy did not help in associating that saint with the support for the needy. It is also possible that, since Þorlákr’s cult had already developed in that direction, it was more convenient for an average Icelander to donate alms to the needy on the day commemorating that saint rather than Guðmundr.

e.g. Bishop Stefán Jónsson’s (1491–1518, of Skálholt) absolution letter (*DI* VI, 205.), Sólveig Björnsdóttir’s will (*DI* VI, 297.), a vow made by the inhabitants of Eyjafjörður (*DI* VII, 102.), Magnús Einarsson’s will (*DI* VII, 128.).

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE DEATH OF THE SAINT AND HIS POSTHUMOUS FAME

As mentioned in the 'Introduction', it has been generally assumed that Guðmundr, although never canonized, enjoyed popularity among the Icelanders. Stefán Karlsson has suggested that he was considered a popular saint but the Church was against Guðmundr's cult.¹ The image of that popularity, certainly directly after his death, or even pre-mortem, seems to be based mainly on the evidence from the sagas. How this popularity can be measured, and why the Church would object to the veneration, are the two vital questions in this context as well as which particular authority within the Church objected to the cult. This chapter examines the official beginning of the saint's veneration: the process of translation and other events which put his relics in focus.

The monasteries of Þingeyrar and Munkaþverá arguably played a decisive role in creating the *fama sanctitatis* and the cult of Guðmundr. The bishops whose names are connected with the fate of the saint's bones acted largely under the influence of the local clerical circles in order to reach a consensus after numerous conflicts. The issue of Guðmundr's popularity is complex: as the most recently deceased saint he must have been well remembered. His life has been portrayed in six sagas, four of which were composed after the translation in 1315. Thus there is no doubt that the learned influential circles aimed at spreading Guðmundr's saintly reputation. The questions that need to be answered are whether it is reflected elsewhere and how the beginning of the official veneration is recorded. The time span under consideration is 1315–1403, although the interpretation of the document dated to 1403 is debatable. Can the first official vow made by the inhabitants of Eyjafjörður at Möðruvellir indeed be considered a spontaneous initiative, or another act performed under the influence of the monks? What can be said about the aim and the reasons of the clerical initiative to spread Guðmundr's veneration?

¹ Stefán Karlsson, 'Guðmundar sögur biskups', pp. 153 and 157. Few specific arguments to support this view, however, are presented in this publication.

8.1. *Pre-mortem prophecies*

André Vauchez has claimed that some fourteenth-century canonization processes reveal the change of attitude towards the saints. The records suggest that there were witnesses who visited a saint not to ask for a cure, but to verify and, if possible, experience personally the reality of the miraculous gifts attributed to them. The chief of these was spiritual clairvoyance. Another was the prophetic charisma, which was a direct extension of it. Vauchez writes, “the prodigies expected of the saints were therapeutic and apotropaic. In the popular mind, holy men and women were beginning to be seen also as clairvoyants who shared the divine privilege of omniscience”.² Visions, revelations and prophecies acquired great importance with the rise of mystical sanctity. The examples from the narratives concerning Guðmundr Arason’s episcopacy clearly reveal that not only “the popular mind”, but also educated clerics and chieftains appreciated the saints’ gift of clairvoyance. The Icelandic sagas are rich in prophetic remarks and leave the readers with the impression that all types of individuals were able to predict the events to come. It is not surprising to find a passage in *Lárentíus saga* telling about how the bishop dreamt of holding St. Lawrence’s relics shortly before his death.³ The recording of such abilities, especially if the number of prophetic messages was large, proved the saintliness of the bishops and might have led to the beginning of a canonization process. The authors of the fourteenth-century variants of Guðmundr’s *vita* certainly had that in mind.

Guðmundr’s prophetic skills increased in the period of his episcopacy. Different kinds of prophetic messages have been recorded in the sources. There are a few more incidents that reveal the bishop’s extraordinary ability of seeing things that occurred at various places when he was not present (such as the drowning of a group of people in Norway), a feature he shares with such renowned saints as Ambrose⁴ and Benedict.⁵ *GJtb* and *GB* also mention some prophetic statements about the events to come concerning the career or family

² Vauchez gives here rather drastic examples of prophesizing collective catastrophes, which was as common in the Nordic countries (Bridget, Dorothy of Montau and Nicholas of Linköping) as in Italy from the second half of the fourteenth century (Vauchez, *Sainthood in the later Middle Ages*, p. 525).

³ *Lárentíus saga* A ch. 57 and B ch. 66.

⁴ *Ambrosius saga byskups*, ch. 26.

⁵ *Benedictus saga*, ch. 20.

life of certain individuals. Guðmundr's friend Einarr Ásbjarnarson⁶ and two brothers he had ordained, Narfi Snorrason and Bárðr Skarð-Snorrason, were among them.⁷ Both Einarr and Narfi heard from the bishop that they would keep their vows and enjoy family life till the day they died, and Bárðr heard that he would die from wounds, but his tonsure would remain untouched. An interesting fact to observe in the context of a previously mentioned morality and chastity issue is that both Einarr and Narfi were urged by the bishop to take the ordination *and* found families. Narfi's case is especially interesting here as the text clearly states that celibacy was being observed in Iceland at the time, and Narfi requested a meeting with the archbishop to tell him that he was not going to divorce his wife.⁸ The archbishop gave Narfi permission to stay married and did not make him renounce the vows. Again, it must be underlined that as a priest, Guðmundr is not reported to have criticised or opposed any relationships between men and women. No negative comments concerning man-woman relationships (even if clergymen were concerned) have been noted during the years of his episcopacy either. Whenever a question of sexual morality or male-female relationships is raised in the text, the negative comments and allusions are those that represent the authorial opinion, and not Guðmundr's. Numerous examples show that he predicted people's deaths and that it was accepted as a fact.⁹ In the context of conflicts with different chieftains such premonitions were given a lot of value by the saga authors/compiler. They concerned Guðmundr's supporters such as Eyjólfur Kársson,¹⁰ Aron Hjörleifsson or Þórðr Sturluson,¹¹ but also the men who opposed him, like Sighvatr Sturluson.¹² The saint's prediction concerning his own death is, however, merely the

⁶ *GJtb*, ch. 5; *GB*, ch. 119.

⁷ *GJtb*, ch. 12; *GB*, ch. 127.

⁸ Orri Vésteinsson argues that clerical celibacy wasn't an issue in Iceland before the 1240s (Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland* 2000, pp. 234–7). Since Narfi died in 1284 and Einarr in 1305 (if the dates are to be trusted), the problem would, indeed, concern them.

⁹ *GB*, ch. 84.

¹⁰ Genealogy 32. He lived at Breiðabólstaðr in Vatnsdalur, Stakkar/Rauðasandr and Flatey, for more references see name index/*Sts* II, p. 382. He was related to one of Guðmundr's great supporters, Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, by his marriage to Hrafn's daughter, Herdis (*DI* I, 97, p. 25). Eyjólfur's father, Kár Geirmundarson, was supposedly a close friend of Hrafn (*DI* I, 143, p. 579).

¹¹ *GD*, chs. 75 and 76.

¹² *GD*, ch. 69.

forementioned remark about “meeting” Þórðr. The authors make it clear that he was not eager to reveal such facts. One day a woman named Hallbera *hetta* confronted Guðmundr about the revelation of his holiness.¹³ Guðmundr did not like the question and told the woman to stop asking him about that. She refused to accept the reply and insisted that Guðmundr should answer, maintaining “because you know all that as well as other things, if you only want”.¹⁴ In order to stop the inquiry the bishop revealed that thirty-five years should pass from his death till the translation of his bones, which indeed was quite correct, as shall be discussed below.¹⁵

Guðmundr seems to have had a better gift of prophecy about events to come or the lives of certain people than his counterparts, Þorlákr or Jón. Jón Ögmundarson’s biographer(s) underlined that many things were revealed to the bishop in his sleep.¹⁶ For instance, Jón was informed about the death of his friend, Priest Þorkell Trandill, by the apparition of an unknown man.¹⁷ Another incident took place shortly before Jón’s death; Jón told one of his clerics, Þorvarðr, a good writer/scribe (“ritari góðr”) about the death of a priest for whom Þorvarðr had written a book.¹⁸ The source evidence on Þorlákr does not contain many events of that kind; the narratives mention an apparition of a man advising him against getting married.¹⁹ A prophetic dream concerning specifically his career is that of Þorlákr walking out of the church with St. Martin’s head in his lap.²⁰ This is a very interesting image since the relics of St. Martin were supposedly the possession of Hólar cathedral, which might be an allusion to the fact that the first dreams and miracles that led to the translatio of Þorlákr’s bones were recorded in the northern diocese. Certainly, it is also another example of “co-operation” among saints, and a sign that Þorlákr would become another holy bishop whose relics would be revered.

¹³ “Hve nær mvn helgi þin vp koma, segir hon” (GB ch. 85).

¹⁴ “[...] þviat alltt þetta ok annat vęst<v> ef þv vill” (GB ch. 85).

¹⁵ “[...] þa er lidit er fra andlati minu halfr fiordi tagr vetra þa mvnv bein min or iordv tekin med þeim at bvrðvm sem gvð vill at verði” (GB, ch. 85).

¹⁶ JS, ch. 15.

¹⁷ JS, ch. 16.

¹⁸ JS, ch. 19.

¹⁹ þA, ch. 5; þB, ch. 5.

²⁰ þA, ch. 17; þB, ch. 31.

8.2. *Death and funeral*

In *ÍslS*, which is the earliest extant narrative to mention Guðmundr's death, that event has been considered one of the turning points, and it is rather probable that Sturla Þórðarson himself was the source of information on it.²¹ According to the source the bishop fell ill during winter 1237. The illness is not specified and symptoms other than blindness are not named or described in details. *ÍslS* as well as the fourteenth-century variants mention Guðmundr's confinement to bed until after the Feast of Pope Gregory (12 March).²² A priest named Jón gave him extreme unction, but before that took place, Guðmundr had made arrangements about his property with the exception of the books he shared with other clerics, and gave exact instructions about his place of burial. The details of those arrangements are unknown, but the burial site is revealed in the text: in the south wing of the church between the two priests whom he had buried there. He died a few days later, at the age of sixty-seven, at the moment when two clerics, Helgi and Þorkell, lifted him onto a board sprinkled with ashes. The younger narratives do not specify whose idea was to prepare a deathbed of this kind, only according to *GD* stating that it was Guðmundr's wish; in any case it must have been inspired by the formula "ashes to ashes, dust to dust", a symbol of transition of human life on earth.²³

Guðmundr's burial was carefully arranged and accompanied by wonderful signs. His body was placed indoors for the night before burial, and then (on the third day after death), brought into the church and shrouded. Many people who saw the body wondered at its good condition, and specifically at its "fairness".²⁴ When the body was taken to Hólar cathedral for burial, two bells were rung and the old church began to shake. Nevertheless, a priest named Jón decided that another two should be rung and the church suddenly became much steadier. Nothing changed when the rest of the bells were rung as well. It was interpreted as a wonderful sign and, as Sturla Þórðarson reports, many other remarkable events took place on that day, which comforted

²¹ Zimmerling, 'Bishop Guðmundr', p. 563.

²² *ÍslS*, ch. 119; *GB*, ch. 115; *GD*, ch. 72.

²³ "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." (*Genesis*, 3:19, King James Version).

²⁴ "[...] kváðust aldri sét hafa dauðs manns hold jafnbjart eða þekkiligt sem þetta" (*ÍslS*, ch. 119; *GB*, ch. 115). See also *GD*, ch. 73.

those who were sorrowful because of the bishop's death.²⁵ Kolbeinn *kaldaljós*, a man who during Guðmundr's priestly career witnessed a miracle, was among people who gathered there, and held a sermon over Guðmundr's grave.²⁶

Sturla Þórðarson and the younger authors leave no doubt about the respect with which the upper echelons of the Church hierarchy regarded Guðmundr:

Finnt ok varla á váru landi eða víðara sá maðr, er þokkasælli hafi verit af sínum vinum en þessi inn blessaði biskup, svá sem vátta bréf Þóris erkibiskups eða Guttorms erkibiskups eða ins ágæta konungs Hákonar ok margra annarra dýrligra manna í Nóregi, at þeir unnu honum sem bróður sínum ok báðu hann fulltings í bænum sem föður sinn.²⁷

Nothing can be said with certainty about King Hákon (Hákonarson's) attitude towards Guðmundr and the attitude of both archbishops has probably been presented here more favourably than it really was.²⁸ The bishop supposedly visited Norway and stayed with both archbishops, perhaps the author meant to suggest that he also had made an impression on the king, and perhaps that his *fama sanctitatis* was spreading in Norway.²⁹ Sturla has underlined his own faith in Guðmundr's holiness and hope for the acknowledgement of the bishop's merits: "We believe that he has been received into the kingdom of heaven for the eternal life chosen for all the saints and good men of God".³⁰

²⁵ *ÍslS*, ch. 119; *GJtb*, ch. 1; *GB*, ch. 115.

²⁶ Kolbeinn Arnórsson *kaldaljós*, whose cow Guðmundr healed, see 4.1.1.

²⁷ "In our country, or even in many others, there is seldom found a man more well loved by his friends than this beloved bishop, as letters from Archbishop Þórir or Archbishop Guttorm or the splendid King Hákon and many other glorious men in Norway all affirm; they loved him like a brother and asked for his assistance in their services as from a father" (*ÍslS*, ch. 119).

²⁸ *GB*, ch. 115, list Sigurðr [Eindriðason] (abp. 1231–52) instead of Guttormr. This is an interesting detail; while Guðmundr might indeed have had a positive relationship with Þórir and Guttormr, Sigurðr's attitude towards him might have been skeptical, if not negative. He was the one who demanded that Guðmundr resigned the office as the conflicts with the chieftains became dramatic, and who immediately sought papal approval of his decision (see below). Thus, putting Archbishop Sigurðr's name in this context is either the result of an error or an attempt to convince the audience about Guðmundr's good relationships with his Norwegian superiors.

²⁹ See 7.3.1. above. If it was indeed King Hákon Hákonarson who had a collection of Marian miracles translated, his support for Guðmundr, the admirer of the Virgin, would be even more symbolic.

³⁰ "Vánum hann meðtekið hafa himnaríki ok eilifa gleði með öllum heilögum guðs útvöldum mönnum" (*ÍslS*, ch. 119; *GJtb*, ch. 1; *GB*, ch. 115).

Arngrímr's version is, as in the case of many other passages, rich in details concerning Guðmundr's last days and funeral that the other versions lack. According to *GD*, Guðmundr's eyesight began to worsen four years before his death and the bishop was not able to read for the last two years of his life.³¹ In 1236, eight days after Christmas, the pain in his eyes grew stronger and another sickness followed: Guðmundr's face swelled and the pain in his right cheek was particularly strong. The author writes that the bishop's relatives were with him all the time and read excerpts from the lives of the Church Fathers or other holy texts for him. In February Guðmundr's condition worsened, but that did not stop the bishop from holding a short sermon after the extreme unction had been given to him. Guðmundr prayed till the very last moment and died making the sign of the cross which was also the moment in which he was reciting the Litany and reached the list of the apostles.³² Unsurprisingly, the contents of the sermon as well as the description of Guðmundr's death, underlines the bishop's almsgiving and his care for the poor above all the other good deeds.³³

The death of a saintly bishop is a key moment in many medieval hagiographies. As far as the native Icelandic holy bishops are concerned, it would be hard to decide which one was especially memorable as all descriptions have certain features in common. Like Guðmundr, Jón died of an illness. His death has been reported rather briefly: the bishop prayed and took communion before he died, surrounded by his clerics and the laymen who stayed at Hólar, at the age of sixty-nine.³⁴ Þorlákr's death is described quite briefly as well, but the description does not lack supernatural elements: Chieftain Gizurr Hallsson as well as the bishop's nephew Páll Jónsson were there as Þorlákr made his will: he divided his goods among the chieftains and priests and also provided the poor with support. The bishop held a short speech and asked for forgiveness for anything that could have harmed those who lived and worked with him, to which Gizurr replied that those who were gathered around Þorlákr's bed should ask for his forgiveness. When he was just about to die he became thirsty and asked for some water, which likened him to Christ in the dying hour.³⁵ Like Jón's,

³¹ *GD*, ch. 72.

³² *GD*, ch. 72.

³³ *GD*, chs. 74 and 75.

³⁴ *JS*, ch. 20.

³⁵ *ÞA*, ch. 18, *ÞB*, ch. 35.

Þorlákr's illness has not been identified in the text, but it is indicated that he had had many wounds and they all healed after his death.

The presence of illnesses at different stages of life or shortly before death might be perceived as a meaningful fact in the hagiographical context, as Ásdís Egilsdóttir has suggested.³⁶ Suffering only strengthened the piety of the holy bishops and shaped their character. Þorlákr's face, like Jón's (and Guðmundr's) was unusually bright after death, which is a traditional hagiographical motif. The author has observed, "never before Bishop Þorlákr has anyone's saintliness or miracles come up in Iceland, and many people were comforted [after his death] with dreams in which God revealed his merits".³⁷ Different people had dreams that confirmed Þorlákr's holy status: Chieftain Gizurr Hallsson, a farmer from Vatnsdalur and, according to the younger version, a hermit (*einsetumaðr*).³⁸ Archbishop Eiríkr Ívarsson in a letter to Bishop Páll reportedly called him a living saint ("helgan [...] í lífinu") and was convinced that he would be "the gem of glorious powers and authority to God".³⁹ The sagas of Icelandic bishops frequently refer to the motif of suffering and hardship which the prelates were supposed to experience during their lives, even when there is little in the narratives to suggest that.⁴⁰ It is possible that for many hagiographers the ideal of martyrdom was still valued more highly than other kinds of holiness, and the authors tried to demonstrate at least signs of it. Guðmundr's exile from Hólar and his conflicts with certain chieftains were relatively easy motifs to use in that way and Arngrímr Brandsson especially insisted on underlining the bishop's suffering for faith. Despite the authorial efforts to underline the hardships which the Icelandic holy prelates had to face during their lives or on their deathbed, it is quite clear that the episcopal holiness in Iceland was not

³⁶ Ásdís Egilsdóttir, 'Jarteinir, líkami, sál og trúarlíf', in *Studies in Honour of Hermann Pálsson on his 80th birthday, 26th May 2001*. *Studia Mediaevalia Septentrionalia*, 6, ed. by Ásdís Egilsdóttir and Rudolf Simek (Vienna: Fassbaender, 2001), 13–9 (pp. 14–5).

³⁷ "[...] aldregi hafði (fyrr) upp komit helgi né jarteinir nökkurs manns á Íslandi en Þorláks byskups, en þó váru margir menn huggaðir af þekkiligum draumum, þar til er guð birti verðleika hans framar" (*ÞA*, ch. 19; see also *ÞB*, ch. 37).

³⁸ *ÞA*, ch. 19; *ÞB*, chs. 38 and 39.

³⁹ "dýrdligan kraftanna gimstein fyrir guði ok mikils ráðanda" (*ÞA*, ch. 19; see also *ÞB*, ch. 40).

⁴⁰ Hunt, *A Study of Authorial Perspective*, pp. 236–40. Such remarks are to be found even in the sagas about Ísleifr Gizurarsson and Jón Ögmundarson whose episcopacies were not disturbed by any major conflicts.

based on martyrdom. Instead, the piety and wisdom of the bishops in addition to prodigies and miracles shaped their reputation.

At the same time, quite a number of individuals of various backgrounds in Icelandic hagiographies (but also other texts) were remembered for their exceptional piety. That piety was often demonstrated in dramatic circumstances: during the fight at Hólar in 1209 a man named Sveinn Jónsson left the church with others who sought shelter there, to avoid spilling blood inside. Sveinn himself died as a martyr; he asked to have all his limbs cut off before they would decapitate him because he wished to die praying. And so he did, bravely singing *Ave Maria* as his enemies dismembered him.⁴¹ One could not disagree that Sveinn's death could be perceived as the death of a saint. Even though he never gained the status of a saint and has only been remembered as Guðmundr Arason's supporter (one of many), the man's exceptional courage had to be commemorated.

Guðmundr's funerary service and the circumstances that the narratives report were rather extraordinary, just like in the case of his holy predecessor at Hólar, but also other Icelandic bishops, for instance Páll Jónsson.⁴² As far as Jón's funeral is concerned, one remarkable event has been recorded. When several clerics wanted to lift the bishop's coffin and carry it to the gravesite, they noticed that it was unusually heavy. One of them decided to check whether some significant part of the service had been omitted or some of the vestments forgotten. As soon as Jón's golden ring was put on the deceased bishop's finger, the coffin was light enough to be lifted from the ground.⁴³ That episcopal ring was an essential detail; before Guðmundr's burial a priest named Eyjólfur came all the way from Vellir and put on his finger the gold ring which the bishop wore to the grave.⁴⁴ One may wonder why Eyjólfur had to come from Vellir to Hólar in order to put the ring on the deceased bishop's finger, and whether it implies the fact that the episcopal ring was not among Guðmundr's possessions at Hólar at the time. That might have happened for two reasons: first, that due to all the conflicts and his long periods of absence the ring had been taken to Vellir for safety's sake, and second, the reason might have been Guðmundr's inability to keep the real duties of his ordination at

⁴¹ *ÍslS*, ch. 24; *GA*, ch. 141; *GB*, ch. 95; *GD*, ch. 36.

⁴² *Páls saga*, chs. 18. and 19, among other signs a red moon was observed.

⁴³ *JS*, ch. 20.

⁴⁴ *ÍslS*, ch. 119.

the time, the reasons being partially his illness, and partially the archbishop's order (resulting from the conflict with chieftains).⁴⁵

Even though the narratives present Guðmundr's last days as undisturbed by any issues that might lead to complications during the funeral, and his saintliness as acknowledged by many without any questions, the official recognition of it had to wait. The prediction made by the bishop about the translation of his bones, even if not very precise, was fulfilled. The closest event would be the incident involving Guðmundr's coffin that came up to the surface of the ground on its own at the time of Jörundr Þorsteinsson's episcopacy which began in 1267.

8.3. *The bishops of Hólar and their role in the cult*

8.3.1. *The first exhumation*

According to *GJtb* and *GB*, during the eighth year of Bishop Jörundr Þorsteinsson's episcopacy (1267–1313) a priest staying in the cathedral of Hólar thought he had heard some noises in the part of the church where Guðmundr was buried. He went there and saw that the coffin had risen from the earth on its own. The priest reported this to Bishop Jörundr, but received a negative response as the place was found undisturbed.⁴⁶ Some time later a fire broke out at Hólar and there was a threat that the whole place would burn down, since nothing could extinguish it. People gathered by the church decided to go inside and ask Jörundr about what should be done. The bishop, whom

⁴⁵ In 1222, during Guðmundr's second stay in Norway, Archbishop Guttorm decided that the conflict with certain chieftains became so serious that Guðmundr should resign his office. Since a permission from the pope Honorius III (pp. 1216–27) was needed to resign or keep the office, Guðmundr sent priest Ketill Íngjaldsson to Rome in order to obtain the papal letter. The priest's journey was successful; Guðmundr was allowed to resign, but only if he wished to do so ("si vult cedere, cedat". See the detailed description of Ketill's journey in *GD* chs. 59, 60 and 61). However, since the bishop was not exactly willing to do that, he returned to Iceland in 1226 and did not announce any change, thereby keeping his office even in exile. In 1232 Archbishop Sigurðr ordered Guðmundr to resign; the bishop stayed in Eyjafjörður for two years and then returned to Hólar in 1234. Having heard that, the archbishop issued a letter to Pope Gregory IX complaining about the situation. The pope ordered Guðmundr to either resign the office or accept help (*coadjutor*), but the letter was written after the bishop's death (16 May 1237) and arrived in Iceland much later (*DI* I, 132 and 133).

⁴⁶ "Nú reiddist byskup ok þótti sjá það vera lyginn ok tók illa á honum ok rak hann á brott" (*GJtb*, ch. 23 and *GB*, ch. 137).

they found by the altar, decided that God's advice should be followed. The only right means to save the church would be water previously consecrated by Guðmundr Arason which must be poured on the fire.⁴⁷ What happened next has been described as follows:

Litlu síðar eftir þenna atburð, er þat sagt, at Jörundr byskup lét taka upp ór jörðu bein Guðmundar byskups ok tveggja presta með honum, er lágu á sína hönd honum hvárr. Hét annarr Björn, en annarr Gunnsteinn. Þar var við herra Hrafn Oddsson, ok sagði hann svá, at hann vissi eigi, hverra manna bein þat váru, er honum váru sýnd, ok engum þótti meira um vert þessi bein en annarra hverdagsliga manna ok bein Guðmundar byskups væri þunn ok saurig, ok mátti þat vel vera, því at hann var harðlífr hér í heimi.

Sú var frásögn Bjarna Hallfreðarsonar, er þá var djákn at Hólum, er líkamr Guðmundar byskups var ór jörðu tekinn. 'Þat sá ek,' sagði hann, 'at menn grófu gröf í stúkunni mannsvaxtar eða djúpara ok settu þar niðr kistu Guðmundar byskups ok fylldu síðan þá gröf af moldu þar á ofan stógrjót'.⁴⁸

Jörundr Þorsteinsson was an Icelander whose career developed in the vicinity of the learned circles.⁴⁹ He became the student of Abbot Brandr Jónsson at Þykkvibær in 1250 and a priest in 1258. After the death of Brandr, who for one year was the bishop of Hólar, Jörundr was elected as the follower of his former tutor. He left for Norway in 1265 for the consecration and returned to Iceland most probably in

⁴⁷ "Legit til nv herra gott rað ok skiott at eigi breNi bæren. Byskup sv(aradi). Taki vattn G(vdmvndar) byskvps ok stokvi því jelldin." This episode is strikingly similar to that described in *GA*, ch. 47 and *GD*, ch. 11 which describes the fire at Hólar c. 1195 and Brandr's use of water consecrated by Guðmundr. Also in this episode Guðmundr's holy water extinguished the unstoppable fire, which made another sceptical bishop of Hólar change his mind about Guðmundr's saintliness.

⁴⁸ "Shortly afterwards, it is said, Bishop Jörundr ordered the exhumation of Guðmundr's bones as well as of two priests buried on Guðmundr's left and right hand side. One of them was called Björn and the other—Gunnsteinn. Hrafn Oddson witnessed it and declared that he did not know whose bones he was shown and that nobody would consider those bones more valuable than the bones of average people, and that Guðmundr's bones were thin and dark—the reason must have been the hard life he had experienced. There was another tale, by Björn Hallfreðarson, who was a deacon at Hólar when Guðmundr's bones were exhumed. He said that in the chapel a man size grave was dug into which Guðmundr's coffin was put, and afterwards the grave was filled with soil and a big stone was put on the top." (*GJtb*, ch. 23 and *GB*, ch. 137) contain the passage about Guðmundr's coffin. *GJtb*, ch. 24 and *GB*, ch. 138 mention the fire at Hólar extinguished with the consecrated water as well as the exhumation.

⁴⁹ Jón Helgason, *Íslands Kirke fra dens Grundlæggelse til Reformationen. En Historisk Fremstilling* (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gads Forlag, 1925), 178–81.

autumn 1267.⁵⁰ In *Árna saga* it is said that Jörundr received authority over the whole of Iceland “because of Bishop Sívarðr’s bad health” (“sakir elli og vanmegnis Sívarðar biskups”).⁵¹ The bishop concerned here was Sigvarðr Þéttmarsson (1238–1268) at Skálholt. Jörundr ordered Árni Þorláksson to assist Sigvarðr, which he did for nearly a year till Sigvarðr’s death (1268). *Gottskálksannál* contains an interesting entry dated to 1267 which might suggest that he had received a permit from Archbishop Hákon (1265–7) to constitute a cathedral chapter at Hólar.⁵² The archbishop and the cathedral chapter at Niðaróss were ready to allow the Icelanders to choose the candidates for bishops themselves.⁵³ It was probably arranged between Bishop Jörundr and Jarl Gizurr Þorvaldsson (1209–68)⁵⁴ that the latter would go to Viðey and receive canonical robes (he died, however, before that took place).⁵⁵ Since Gizurr donated Staðr in Reynines to the monastery, it is assumed that Jörundr intended to found an Augustinian order there, but that never took place.⁵⁶ However, Jörundr founded an Augustinian monastery at Möðruvellir in Hörgardalur and a nunnery at Staðr in 1295.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Hermann Pálsson, *Eftir Þjóðveldið. Heimildir annála um íslenska sögu 1263–98* (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1965), p. 108.

⁵¹ *Árna saga*, ch. 7.

⁵² “Vigdr Jorvndr byskup til Hóla [...] feck Jorvndr byskup orlof at gera korb[r]ædur at Holvm.”

⁵³ The issue is discussed by Magnús Stefánsson, ‘Frá goðakirkju til biskupskirkju’, in *Saga Íslands*, ed. by Sigurður Línal, 8 vols. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1978) III, 111–257, pp. 118–20.

⁵⁴ Genealogy 7, name index/*Sts* II, pp. 386–7.

⁵⁵ Magnús Stefánsson suggests this by referring to a note in *Gottskálksannál* dated to 1267 saying that “Þann vetr en sama at jolv[m] var þat radit med þeim Jorundi byskupj og Gisuri jarli at jarl skylldi fara vm svmarit næsta epter til Viðeyjar og taka þa þegar vid kanvka klæðvm” (Magnús Stefánsson, ‘Frá goðakirkju til biskupskirkju’, pp. 118–9).

⁵⁶ The reasons why the Augustinian order at Reynistaður was never founded are numerous. It could have been insufficient means, but also the system of *einkakirkja*, which allowed the laymen to benefit from the taxes imposed on churches while the churches themselves were hardly supported. Finally, it is vital to mention financial demands and levies imposed on clergy/church property, etc., see Magnús Stefánsson, ‘Frá goðakirkju til biskupskirkju’, pp. 119–20. It is not entirely clear, however, why the cathedral chapter was never founded at Hólar (Hermann Pálsson, *Eftir Þjóðveldið*, p. 109).

⁵⁷ The sources disagree about the date. *Annals* III, IV, V and VIII date the foundation of the monastery at Möðruvellir to 1296, but VII dates to 1295. As far as Staðr i Reynines is concerned, in annal VII its foundation is dated to 1295, while in *Annals* II, III, IV and V it is dated to 1296. *Árna saga*, *Viðauki* II, says, “Það sama ár [...] 1295 setti Jörundur biskup klaustur að Stað í Reynisnesi og á Möðruvöllum í

According to the author of *Lárentíus saga*, Jörundr achieved a lot by founding the two monasteries mentioned above: these achievements are underlined in the text of the saga and the annals.⁵⁸ The bishop must have gained some respect among the Icelandic clergy for that. Still, according to *Árna saga* Hrafn Oddsson reportedly described Jörundr's infamous tactic as that of a fox in opposition to that of Bishop Árni, whose approach was more open as that of a bear.⁵⁹ This portrayal was made on the basis of the prelates' involvement in politics and, among other things, dealing with the laymen during the difficult period of *staðamál*.

Hrafn Oddsson may undisputably be considered one of the most influential men of the post-Commonwealth period. He started his career during the Free State, and was the owner of such significant estates as Eyri in Arnafjörður, Sauðafell in Stafholt and Glaumbær in Skagafjörður. He is mentioned in the sources as a chieftain (*goðorðsmaður*), king's retainer (*hirðstjóri*) and a knight (*riddari*).⁶⁰ After the death of Jarl Gizurr, Hrafn was sent to Iceland by King Magnús Hákonarson as one of his two liege vassals (*handgengnir menn*) together with Ormr Ormsson. They were handed supervision over the whole country, which was the peak of Hrafn's career.⁶¹ By the beginning of the 1270s Hrafn had the power over the entire country which must have been possible only after Ormr's death.⁶² In 1273 he shared his power with Þorvarðr Þórarinsson, but in 1279 he became the first *hirðstjóri* and alone had power all over Iceland again.⁶³ Hrafn did not

Hörgárdal", while *Lárentíus saga* B, ch. 13, dates the foundation of the monastery at Möðruvellir to 1296, and that at Staðr to 1295.

⁵⁸ *Lárentíus saga* A, ch. 28 and B, ch. 33; *Annal* VII.

⁵⁹ "[...] Árni byskup gengr sem björn á hvat sem fyrir verður, en Jörundr byskup er slægr sem refr" (*Árna saga*, ch. 102).

⁶⁰ Name index/*Sts* II, pp. 404–5. For the discussion of the Icelandic aristocracy after 1262/4, their functions and titles see e.g. Axel Kristinsson, 'Embættismenn konungs fyrir 1400', *Saga* 26 (1986), 113–52 and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 'The Icelandic Aristocracy after the Fall of the Free State', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 20 (1995), 153–66.

⁶¹ Björn Þorsteinsson and Sigurður Línal, 'Lögfesting Konungsvalds', pp. 41 and 55. Since Ormr drowned shortly afterwards, the king handed over the responsibility to Hrafn and Þorvarðr Þórarinsson in 1273 at a meeting with chieftains in Bergen. See also Hermann Pálsson, *Eftir Þjóðveldið*, pp. 113–25.

⁶² Björn Þorsteinsson and Sigurður Línal, 'Lögfesting Konungsvalds', p. 57.

⁶³ Björn Þorsteinsson and Sigurður Línal, 'Lögfesting Konungsvalds', p. 55. The title/function Hrafn received was, actually *merkismaður* (see the description of the functions pp. 55–7).

seem to have had much influence on the establishment of a new law code in Iceland, but spoke against the acceptance of a new tithe at the general assembly in 1281, and has been presented in the source material as a fierce opponent of Bishop Árni Þorláksson.⁶⁴

Hrafn's communication with Jörundr is difficult to examine, as the sources provide little information on the bishop's participation in *staðamál*. It is, for instance, not clear what kind of stand Jörundr took at the Brautarholt meeting.⁶⁵ Hrafn's words that "we also know that nobody should decide about law in our country without consulting the king", supposedly uttered at the general assembly in 1284, might be interpreted as a summary of Icelandic faithfulness to the Norwegian king, but, in fact, the authority of the king is probably emphasized here as one opposed to the Icelandic episcopal power.⁶⁶ *Árna saga* mentions reconciliation between Bishop Jörundr and Hrafn Oddsson (as well as other secular leaders) at Hólar.⁶⁷ However, it is the relationship of Hrafn Oddsson and Bishop Árni that is best documented, and the reconciliation of the two after long and intense strife seems to have been most significant to their contemporaries. In general, Jörundr seems to have been absent from many meetings of crucial importance. For instance, his presence at the assembly when *kristinréttur yngri* was being approved of in 1275 is not explicitly mentioned in the sources, and it has been suggested that the bishop was abroad at the time.⁶⁸ *Árna saga* does not mention his presence at the general assembly of 1281 when *Jónsbók* was accepted.⁶⁹ However, Magnús Stefánsson

⁶⁴ Björn Þorsteinsson and Sigurður Línal, 'Lögfesting Konungsvalds', pp. 44 and 186. However, as Hermann Pálsson suggests, one of Hrafn's main tasks after his return to Iceland was to arrange the introduction of the new law code (Hermann Pálsson, *Eftir Þjóðveldið*, p. 115).

⁶⁵ *Árna saga*, chs. 76–78. See also Magnús Stefánsson, 'Frá goðakirkju', p. 195.

⁶⁶ "Svo vitum vér og, að enginn á voru landi á lögum að ráða utan kóngur" (*Árna saga*, ch. 85).

⁶⁷ Ch. 77.

⁶⁸ Magnús Stefánsson has suggested that *kristinréttur yngri* was then, probably, only taken in the area of Skálholt ('Frá goðakirkju', p. 150). Recently the scholarly opinion based not only on the saga material, but also on annals, claims that Bishop Jörundr was, in fact, at the general assembly and that the Christian law was adopted at the time both at Hólar and Skálholt (Magnús Lyngdal Magnússon, 'Kátt er þeim af kristinrétti', esp. pp. 67–9). It is an interesting fact, however, that the sources do not report any conflicts in the North.

⁶⁹ Chs. 62–3.

suggests that it might be just the authorial focus on the problem of *staðamál* and bishop Árni's part at the cost of Jörundr.⁷⁰

Jörundr was the bishop of Hólar for forty six years, and perhaps it was his tactic ("of a fox") of pursuing his goals quietly that assured him such a long episcopacy without as much trouble as Árni's, not to mention Guðmundr's. None of the *Guðmundar sögur* says much about Bishop Jörundr Þorsteinsson. Hardly anything is known about the way the Icelanders reacted to his rule and the obedience to the archbishop (first Jón *rauði*, and then Jörundr) from the very beginning of his episcopal career. As far as his relationship with Bishop Árni is concerned, the two bishops did not always agree. Jörundr reconciled with Hrafn and other laymen in the bishoprics, which was the opposite of what Árni did later at Brautarholt. In the years 1284–88 when the arguments about *staðir* were at their peak, the bishops went in different directions. Jörundr actually admitted that the demands of the laymen were right. Árni did the opposite, claiming that Jörundr's behaviour was forced.⁷¹ He must have been right, as in the autumn of 1289 Bishop Jörundr and Abbott Runólfr Sigmundsson (in Þykkvibær, d. 1307) travelled around the bishoprics in order to claim the authority over the *staðir*. Doubtlessly, Jörundr was devoted to the task and to the archbishop's commands.⁷² Many passages in *Lárentíus saga* which describes the years 1290–1313 (the year of Jörundr's death), focus mainly on Bishop Jörundr's arguments with Lárentíus, and *Árna saga*, which stops at 1291, barely mentions the bishop at all after the description of the events in 1289. None of the texts mentions any further attempts to exhume Guðmundr Arason's bones.

Hrafn's opposition or scepticism towards the honouring of Bishop Guðmundr's bones as relics would seem easy to explain in this context. As a chieftain, whether the event took place before or after the reconciliation with Jörundr, he was against the spread of the cult which might provide the cathedral (and the Church in general) with extra income and power. His attitude is representative of all the

⁷⁰ Pp. 184–5. Supporting this view, the saga suggests between the lines that bishop Jörundr was there: when Loðinn *leppr* mentions "kóngrs réttindi undir fótum troðin sem hér og þá mest af biskupum" (ch. 63). In a letter written probably shortly after the meeting and sent with Erlendr Ólafsson to the king it is suggested that both bishops were against Loðinn. See also ch. 38 where people complain about the burden imposed upon them by the bishops.

⁷¹ See esp. *Árna saga*, chs. 77, 78 and 102.

⁷² Magnús Stefánsson, 'Frá goðakirkju', p. 214.

laymen who wished at the time to keep their control over the privileges of the clergy and their Church property. Furthermore, the central issue of *staðamál* was that of ownership of the churches and everything that belonged to them. Medieval documentary evidence concerning church foundation suggests that the saints to which particular churches were dedicated were perceived as the real owners of *staðir*, and the founder only “took care” of them.⁷³ Scholars have considered the church altar on which the relics were placed the central and most important site of the estate. Magnús Stefánsson has suggested on the basis of a number of passages in saga material that the concept was known and practiced in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Iceland. God, the Virgin Mary and the saints to whom particular churches were dedicated were indeed perceived as the owners of churches.⁷⁴ Interestingly enough, an example involving Hrafn Oddson has been quoted in this context. According to *Þorgils saga skarða*, when Hrafn intended to attack Þorgils *skarði* in 1252 at the *staðr* of Stafholt, where Þorgils was staying with Óláfr Þórðarson *hvítaskáld*, Óláfr reprimanded Hrafn and those who came with him (including Óláfr’s brother, Sturla Þórðarson), saying that he would “ask God Almighty and Bishop Nicholas who owns the place” to avenge the assault.⁷⁵

Nothing in the Icelandic evidence confirms the fact that the secular owners of the church grounds had indisputable rights to the churches or their possessions. On the other hand, two-thirds of the saints mentioned in the gifts to the churches and related provisions of the charters were patron saints of the church involved and a similar pattern is observed in wills, which record donations to local churches and commend the soul of the testator to their patrons.⁷⁶ It must not

⁷³ Magnús Stefánsson, *Staðir og staðamál*, pp. 191–216. The theory was originally suggested by Andreas Heusler in 1885 and opposed by Ulrich Stutz in 1913. Donations of land and other types of offerings to saints (that is: churches and monasteries) were fairly common in many European countries during the Middle Ages (see e.g. Stephen D. White, *Custom, Kinship, and Gifts to Saints. The Laudatio Parentum in Western France, 1050–1150* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), pp. 19–39).

⁷⁴ Magnús Stefánsson, *Staðir og staðamál*, pp. 200–2.

⁷⁵ “Skal ek þess biðja almáttkan guð ok hinn helga Nicholaum biskup, er staðinn á at hann hefni yðr sinna misgerða” (*Þorgils saga skarða*, ch. 17). For Þorgil’s religiousness and devotion to St. Thomas see Margaret Cormack, ‘Saints’ Lives and Icelandic Literature in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries’, in *Saints and Sagas. A Symposium*, ed. by Hans Bekker-Nielsen and others (Odense: Odense University Press, 1994), 27–47, p. 35.

⁷⁶ Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 60.

be assumed that all Icelandic churches owned relics belonging to the saints to which the churches were dedicated (however a “relic” is defined).⁷⁷ Numerous *máldagar* list “relics” or “a shrine”, but they are never named; only saga material provides some specific examples.⁷⁸ Thus, it may be assumed that the relics had mainly a symbolic function, and the name of a patron saint had a more significant role.

8.3.2. *The translation*

The story about the translation of Guðmundr’s bones is, surprisingly, not found not in any of the *Guðmundar sögur* but in a saga about the Bishop Lárentius Kálfsson. When Bishop Auðunn Þorbergsson searched for the bones in 1315 he dug first in the choir, where he found bones left by Bishop Jörundr. Having received the information on the site of the burial from Kolli Helgason, he then dug in the nave, where Guðmundr’s bones—identified by the evidence of a broken leg he had suffered in his youth—were eventually found:

Lárentius saga A 29.

Þegar er herra byskup kom heim ór visitatione leitaði hann eftir hvar bein góða Guðmundar byskups mundi vera, því at þat hafði svá verit vanrækt áðr at menn vissu eigi áðr hvar þat mundi vera. Var í fyrstu grafit í kórnum innar ok fannz þar eigi, en funduz þar önnur bein í einni kistu, allt samt sem Jörundr byskup hafði látit um búa þá er hann lét nýja kirkjuna.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ The issue needs further examination which the scope of this book does not allow. According to *máldagar* the Icelandic churches had a variety of relics in different types of reliquaries. Although, in principle, all the medieval churches had to have relics in order to be consecrated, not all inventory books list shrines or relics, which may be due to insufficient extant evidence. Magnús Stefánsson argues that the theory about altar including relics as a fundamental site at the church estate does not seem to have had any significance in Iceland. Indeed, very few inventory books specifically mention relics placed on the altars: Reykholt in Borgarfjörður in 1206 and 1224 (*DI* I, 94. and 120.), Vallanes in Fljótsdalshérað in 1270 (*DI* II, 32.), Teigur in Fljótshlíð in 1332 and 1387 (*DI* II, 430. and *DI* III, 347.), Silfrastaðir in Blönduhlíð, in Skagafjörður in 1394 (*Pétursmáldagar*), Staðarfell in Fellsströnd in 1397 (*Vilchinsmáldagi*). I have not noticed any regularity between the type of church and the type of reliquary, *staðir* do not seem to dominate in this case.

⁷⁸ Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 62.

⁷⁹ “As the bishop came home from his visitation he looked for the site where the bones of Bishop Guðmundr the Good might be because it had been such a negligence before that people did not know where they might be. First it was dug in the choir and they [the bones] were not there, but other bones were found in a coffin, all those that Bishop Jörundr ordered to leave there as he decided to build a new church.”

Lárentíus saga A, ch. 30.

Þá var sent eftir Kolla smið Helgasyni; vildi hann ekki fara lengi, því at meðal þeira herra Auðunar byskups var heldr fátt. Þó fór hann um síðir, meir áminnt fyrir skuld Guðmundar byskups en at boði Auðunar byskups. Sagði Kolli þá at þeim stoðaði ekki at leita í kórnum; bauð hann þá brjóta upp gólfitt í framkirkjunni. Miðaði hann svá glögg á at þar sem hann sagði, fannz kista ok henni lauk hann upp; fannz þar í byskups bein ok at öllu svá um búit sem Jörundr byskup hafði sagt honum. Sýndiz þar fótlegggrinn brotinn ok þar um vafit einum hreinum klút; vóru knútarnir mjök stóror á leggnum sem ván var eftir því sem segir í Guðmundar sögu at brotnaði fótr hans fyrir Ströndum, þá er hann var klerkr með Ingimundi frænda sínum. Var þá kallaðr til Auðun byskup ok varð hann af þessu mjök feginn. Lét hann þá gjöra nýja kistu ok þar í leggja bein hins blezaða Guðmundar byskups; síðan lét herra Auðun byskup búa um fagrliga með grind ok færa innar í kirkjunni fyrir framan stóra kross. Gjörðiz þá þegar tilsókn til staðarins ok mikil áheit um allt Ísland ok urðu margar ok ágætar jartegnir.⁸⁰

In *B*, ch. 35, the paragraph follows *A*, chs. 29–30 rather closely, but already at the beginning it is noted that the men did not know where in the choir the relics were placed (“menn vissu ei hvar þat var í kórnum”). That would suggest that someone had the idea that the relics **were** somewhere in the choir. Moreover, the striking difference between the two fragments is that while in *A* Auðunn finds “other bones” (“en funduz þar önnur bein í einni kistu”), according to *B* he finds “the bishop’s bones” (“var undir niðri kista ok í byskups bein”).

The passage continues praising Bishop Auðunn for his eagerness to spread the fame of Guðmundr Arason, not only through the *translatio*, but also the establishment of the feast, a *Guðmundardagr*.⁸¹ The author

⁸⁰ “A smith, Kolli Helgason, was sent for. For a long while he did not want to agree to go [to Hólar]. He went at last, more for the sake of Bishop Guðmundr than to follow Bishop Auðunn’s orders. Kolli said that digging in the choir was no use; he asked them to open the floor in the front part of the church. [He marked the spot so clearly] with what he said that the coffin indeed was found and lifted by him; inside the bishop’s bones were found, arranged in the way Bishop Jörundr had told him. A leg seemed to be broken and a clean piece of cloth was wrapped around it; the joint-bones were very big, which was to be expected according to Guðmundar saga, [the description of] the incident at Strandir where his leg was broken during the journey with his uncle Ingimundr as a cleric. Bishop Auðunn was informed about the find and was very happy because of that. He had a new coffin made for the bones of Bishop Guðmundr; later he made a beautiful fence around [the burial place] and brought [the coffin] into the church in front of the big cross. Great crowds came to Hólar, vows were made all around Iceland and many great miracles took place.”

⁸¹ “Gjörðiz þá þegar um daga Auðunar byskups mikil sókn at Guðmundardegi; söng hann sjálf fyrir sálutiðir ok sálumessu ok heiðraði hann i öllum [hlutum] sem hann

of *Lárentíus saga* had a positive attitude towards him and decided to spread his fame using the translation of Guðmundr Arason as a background:

Tók herra Auðun þetta af góðfýsi þeiri sem Guð blés honum í brjóst, ok svá enn nokot af áeggjan Hákonar konungs sem hann skildiz með hann, en áðr en Auðun byskup kom til var engi minning gjör utan sálumessa var sögð fyrir honum sem fyrir öðrum Hólabyskupum, en engi sókn því at menn vissu ei hvar hans bein og leg var.⁸²

This fragment leaves a double message for the reader. First, that Auðunn was the first one to take decent care of the bones, and second, that he had to look for them because nobody knew where they were.

The first suggestion might be traced in the relationship of Jörundr and Lárentíus. It is known that, although they had known each other for a while since Lárentíus spent some time at Hólar as Jörundr's student, the issue of Möðruvellir in Hörgárdalur in 1293 split them.⁸³ Lárentíus started co-operating with the archbishop and it was difficult for Bishop Jörundr to handle the supervision of his former protégé. The slightly negative depiction of Jörundr in *Lárentíus saga*, therefore, should not be surprising. That the text does not mention Jörundr's attempt at the *translatio* of Guðmundr's relics, but rather stresses Bishop Auðunn's eagerness to promote the cult as the first person to do so, might have two reasons: First, the initial exhumation during Jörundr's episcopacy never actually took place and Auðunn was, indeed, the first one to do so. Second, the exhumation was attempted, but was then opposed by Hrafn Oddsson whose authority in the country (especially the Northern quarter) was undisputable. However, one is tempted to ask

kunni fremst" (*Lárentíus saga* A, ch. 30 and B, ch. 35). None of the annals mentioning the event of *translatio*, however, mentions Guðmundardagur, see Appendix 3.

⁸² "Reverend Auðunn initiated it of his kindness with which God inspired him as well as at the instigation of King Hákon, with whom he parted. But before Bishop Auðunn did it, no memorial feast was arranged without first performing a requiem for him [Guðmundr] and for other bishops of Hólar. No search was initiated, though, since people did not know where his bones and burial place were" (*Lárentíus saga* A, ch. 30 and B, ch. 35).

⁸³ *Lárentíus saga* B, chs. 7–8; *Árna saga*, ch. 102. Sigurðr Guðmundsson, a farmer and a lawyer from Lögmansshlíð claimed half of the grounds belonging to the monastery at Möðruvellir in Hörgárdalur. Bishop Jörundr sent Lárentíus to Möðruvellir with a letter saying that if Sigurðr did not give up his claims, he should be excommunicated. Sigurðr went to Hólar with a group of supporters and received money from Bishop Jörundr (for which he agreed to give up his claims) who denied that he had ever planned to deal with Sigurðr in a harsh way. Thus, Lárentíus had new enemies (Sigurðr and his followers) and no support from the bishop.

why Jörundr never made another attempt, at a time when he was in a better position. With all the support from the archbishop in other matters, such an event could have only provided the bishop with better arguments to claim what—as was assumed—belonged to the Church. Did he decide that the times were too turbulent and that the power he had was sufficient? Or was it his “tactic of a fox” to wait for a more appropriate moment (which, however, never came)?

It has been suggested that the plan of the old cathedral may have been forgotten by all but the craftsman who had been involved in building the new one, who was therefore able to point out the location of the grave.⁸⁴ I find forgetting the gravesite rather unlikely. Before the discussion of the details, however, it must be mentioned that the statement is based on a fragment of the never published (and not included in this study) GC. This variant provides a far more elaborate description of Bishop Jörundr’s role in Guðmundr Arason’s cult.

The description of Jörundr’s attempt is worth mentioning in this discussion. The author dramatized the opposition of clergymen and laymen. Guðmundr’s conflict with certain chieftains might have inspired him to show its continuation after the saint’s death. Due to the *staðamál* and Hrafn’s arguments with the bishops of both sees, the relics had to be hidden and Jörundr is portrayed as a wise clergyman who was concerned about them. The bishop explained to the smith Kolli how he managed to exhume the bones of Guðmundr and other bishops who were buried outside the church and had them buried inside the church as the Church Law bade.⁸⁵ But later the bones of Guðmundr were taken out by Bishop Jörundr secretly, wrapped in white linen cloth, placed in a new coffin and buried in a carefully chosen place.⁸⁶ The bishop’s intention, the wish to revere the saint by placing his bones in a different place, as the text explains, was good, even though they provoked negative comments from the faithful.⁸⁷ That comment

⁸⁴ Foote, ‘Bishop Jörundr’, notes on pp. 107–12 and Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 101.

⁸⁵ It might be a reference to a passage from *Kristinréttur Árna Þorlákssonar*, ch. 11 “Um gróft í kirkjugarði” beginning “Hvern mann kristinn, sem deyr, skal jarða í kirkjugarði vígðum, en eigi í kirkju nema byskups sé lof til”.

⁸⁶ The description of the site is very detailed and clear (“innan undir hvolf yfir kórin”), it was even marked with Guðmundr’s name (“Hier so stendur kistan vnder og er Rist Nafn Gudmundar Byskups aa ennda fiolunnj”, GC in Foote, ‘Bishop Jörundr’, p. 104).

⁸⁷ “Hielldst sa ordromur leingi sijdan af alþijdu.ad J þeim stad mundu hulin liggia bein Gudmundar Byskups.fyrer huad Byskup fieck mikid amæli af morgumm.

indicates that people knew not only the fact that Bishop Jörundr had hidden Guðmundr's bones, but also their place of hiding.⁸⁸ It must have been known and told among others by way of the priest who had witnessed the coffin's miraculous emerging on the surface and who was fired by Bishop Jörundr when the grave turned out to be undisturbed, and by the deacon Bjarni Hallfreðarson.⁸⁹ The passage in *GC* can be understood as an attempt to rehabilitate Bishop Jörundr. His alleged respect for Guðmundr also provides an explanation of his negative attitude towards the witness of the coffin incident, who was accused of having lied about it and sent away.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, Jörundr's command that Guðmundr's actual burial place should not be revealed until after his death creates a certain suspicion about Jörundr's real intentions.⁹¹

seigiannði að hann hylma villði yfir Guðzvinar heilagleik.og misgruna þau takn sem Guð lieti verða huorvitna J sueitum fyrer hans Arnnadar ord." (*GC* in Foote, 'Bishop Jörundr', pp. 103–4.

⁸⁸ Later in the text, however, there is a statement that noone else (except for the bishop) knew, in fact, where Guðmundr's bones were buried, which would imply that people only guessed that the relics were in the most obvious spot ("Enn eigninn onnur víska fíeckst þar af hvar Bein Guðmundar Byskups vardveittust", *GC* in Foote, 'Bishop Jörundr', p. 104). Jörundr's conversation with Kolli Helgason confirms it; the bishop admits that he decided to move Guðmundr's bones and shows the place to Kolli.

⁸⁹ According to *GC*, Bishop Jörundr told Kolli that he had only informed two clergymen about the place ("kalladi eg til mijn presta ij. leiniliga þorstein liasmid huonn þu matter sia. er þann tijma var hier Sacrista og hann annan er anndadist er þu kunner nockud greina"—*GC* in Foote, 'Bishop Jörundr', p. 104).

⁹⁰ The priest, however, was consistent and claimed that his story was true ("en hann helt sögu sinni, sem áðr hafði hann sagt", *GJtb*, ch. 23, *GB*, ch. 137). In the hagiographical material those who "discover" or "rediscover" the relics, or witness miraculous events concerning relics, are usually praised for it. As discussed above, saints whose relics were to be found often appeared in dreams or visions to those who were supposed to initiate the process. Such chosen individuals were often revered members of the local religious community, who commanded respect and authority. When the recipient of a dream or vision was of a lower status, its interpretation was often the responsibility of someone of superior status (Geary, *Living with the Dead*, p. 204). In this particular context Bishop Jörundr's attitude might be interpreted in different ways: as sceptical (which would mean that he was unwilling to promote Guðmundr's cult) or conservative (which would mean that he was against the abuse of Guðmundr's reputation as a saint). The event took place on Easter Sunday, and the comparison of Guðmundr's bones rising up to the surface of the floor with Christ's resurrection might have seemed rather bold (According to *GJtb* and *GB* it happened on *páskasunnmorgin*). However, according to *GC*, it was *palm sunnu dags morgun*).

⁹¹ A document dated to 1281 which concerns Church possessions contains a passage in which it is explicitly stated that it is a sacrilege to take from the church anything that is hidden there for some purpose ("svo oc ef tekit uerdr ur kirkju. þat sem þar uerdr lagt til geymslu", *DI* II, 102). It is possible that the issue of sacrilege and church possessions was one of many which Árni Þorláksson wanted to discuss at the general assembly in 1281. Being a bishop, Jörundr would probably have been allowed

It is difficult to establish the date of Jörundr's conversation with Kolli, but even if it supposedly took place after the rearrangement of the cathedral at Hólar, Kolli, who was consulted by Jörundr's follower at Hólar, should not have had any problems finding the relics.⁹²

My first argument against the assumption that the location of Guðmundr's new grave was neglected lies in the way the tales about his life and miracles circulated. Since the sources quoted are datable, the comparison of the fragments under consideration and the time span is possible. To begin with *Ísls*, it must be borne in mind that Guðmundr Arason is present throughout the first half of the story. Sturla Þórðarson, who knew Guðmundr in person, would certainly spread the bishop's fame. The time of composition of *Jarteinabók*, whose numerous passages refer to the events in *Ísls* is debated, but the stories reflect great interest in Guðmundr's saintly reputation. The fourteenth century variants of his *vita* depend on one another as well as on other sources which concern Guðmundr. An interesting pattern emerges: there are sources which focus on Guðmundr composed and written down between the 1230s-1280s (*Hrafn saga*, GP, *Ísls*) and then those composed in the 1320s and later (*Arons saga*, GA, GB, GC, GD). It is rather doubtful that the temporal gap of forty years would affect Guðmundr's fame, certainly not among the learned clergy in the northern diocese. Even if one assumes that the faithful from lower layers of the society were unable to influence Bishop Jörundr and force him to reveal the site of Guðmundr's coffin, and that the secular leaders objected to the display of the relics, I find it difficult to accept the idea that some more powerful clergymen were not informed about the site where the relics were buried by Jörundr.

The co-operation among the northern scribes must not be underrated here, and the structure of that network is another argument against the inability to locate Guðmundr's grave.⁹³ The authors of *Gjtb*

to move relics from the church, not only to hide them, while facing the danger of theft or disturbance of the cult by the laymen. However, Jörundr's real intentions could be questioned in this context.

⁹² Foote, 'Bishop Jörundr', p. 109, note 70: "Only in the present text is the disinterment set in direct connection with the building of the new church by Jörundr, which was evidently begun about 1280". The changes made by Bishop Jörundr have been discussed e.g. by Þorsteinn Gunnarsson and Kristján Eldjárn, *Um Hóladómkirkju* (Hólar: Hólanefnd, 1993) and ed. by Þorsteinn Gunnarsson and others, 'Hóladómkirkja', in *Kirkjur Íslands* 6 (Reykjavík, 2005), 159–226.

⁹³ The issue was discussed e.g. by Karl Gunnar Johansson in 'Bergr Sökkason och Arngrímur Brandsson—översättare och författare i samma miljö', in *Old Norse myths*,

and *GB* are unknown, but since they actually copy the account from *Ísls*, one might assume that they were composed under the influence of the northern clergy and, presumably, also laymen. Other sources of concern in this chapter, *GC*, *GD* and *Lárentíus saga*, had their origins in the same circles. Bergr Sokkason, the author of *GC*, Arngrímr Brandsson, the author of *GD*, and Árni Lárentíusson (b. 1304), were among the most productive, if not the most productive, scribes both in the North of Iceland and in Iceland as a whole. Bergr was a monk at Þingeyrar (1317), a prior (1322) and then abbot (1325) at Munkaþverá. Arngrímr began as a priest at Skálholt, and then at Oddi (1334–1341). In 1341 he entered Þingeyrar as a monk and from 1351–1361/62 was abbot there. Árni started his career at Þingeyrar together with his father Lárentíus Kálfsson and Bergr Sokkason, in 1317. He must have co-operated with Bergr at Munkaþverá.⁹⁴ Their careers flourished after Jörundr's episcopacy, but they were the representatives of clergymen whose education, experience and connections would most probably allow them to intervene and receive the information about such important relics.

The third argument against the “loss” of and “forgetting” about Guðmundr's gravesite is the fact that the saint is relatively well represented not only in the sagas, but also in the annals. The annals seem to be the least reliable source. It is uncertain whether the notes on Guðmundr's life and death, and then on each of the exhumations, were written successively. However, the intention of spreading Guðmundr's cult behind them seems to be quite clear. Interestingly, Priest Einarr Hafliðason (1307–93), who most probably was the author of *Annal VII* received his education at Þingeyrar and Hólar and is considered the

literature and society: proceedings of the 11th International Saga Conference, 2–7 July, 2000, University of Sydney, ed. by Geraldine Barnes and Margaret Clunies Ross (Sydney: Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Sydney, 2000), 181–97.

⁹⁴ The two variants of *Lárentíus saga* which mention Jörundr's exhumation of Guðmundr's bones, it must be remembered, are not identical. Neither is their provenance: A seems to be more in favour of the monks at Möðruvellir (who were, among others, against the idea of having Bishop Jörundr as their abbot) while B seems to present more arguments against the monks at Möðruvellir. A was, possibly, written in Möðruvellir and B at Hólar. The comparison shows an interesting aspect of the monastic-episcopal relations in the Northern Quarter. (Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, ‘Introduction’ in *Biskupa Sögur* ed. by Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, Íslensk fornrit 17, 3 vols. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag), III (1998), lviii–cxx (pp. xcvi–c).

potential author of *Lárentíus saga*.⁹⁵ He worked for Bishop Lárentíus as *officialis* and thus was well familiar with the learned and influential clergy, who certainly participated in the composition and compilation of annals (or particular entries). Taken together, the documentary evidence strongly suggests that Guðmundr's reputation and the events reported were relatively well known throughout Iceland. Even if the sagas and the annals contain the same information due to the process of mutual copying, it is difficult to establish who was responsible for that process and in what way. If many different scribes were involved in the copying and recording, the spread of the information was rather wide.

Jörundr was the Bishop of Hólar in the years 1267–1313. His attempted *translatio* (assuming it took place at all) can be dated to some time in the 1270s.⁹⁶ Even if Hrafn Oddsson's opposition was strong and his power rather authoritarian in the northern quarter at the time, would it be necessary and reasonable for Bishop Jörundr to hide the relics, and would it be possible to keep a secret for circa fourty years? I find that very doubtful. The reason for including the story about Guðmundr's coffin in *GJtb* in the first place must remain an open question since the original manuscript is lost and the dating of the relevant leaves is problematic. An assumption (a very weak one, though) might be made that the person responsible for this account in *GJtb* had witnessed Auðunn's translation in 1315 and wished to attribute some initiative to an Icelander. Jörundr was the second Icelandic bishop of Hólar since Guðmundr's death.⁹⁷ Brandr Jónsson was the first Icelander who held that position since 1237, but since his episcopacy only lasted one year (1263–4), Jörundr was the only possible candidate. It was rather obvious that he was not as highly esteemed as Brandr, so perhaps that was the reason for an attempt to rehabilitate him in the narratives? Again, it must be underlined that Iceland's incorporation into the Norwegian kingdom in 1262/4 did not cause a dramatic disruption in the society. Nevertheless, the fact

⁹⁵ Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, 'Introduction', pp. lxiv–lxxv in the 'Introduction' to *Lárentíus saga biskups*.

⁹⁶ According to both *GJtb* and *GB*, the coffin incident took place in the eight year of Jörundr's episcopacy ("á inu átta ári byskupsdóms síns"), and the fire at Hólar followed by the exhumation of Guðmundr's bones might have taken place some time afterwards.

⁹⁷ Before him two bishops at the see of Hólar were Norwegian: Bótólfr (his patronymic is unknown, 1238–47) and Heinrekr Kársson (1247–60).

that two Norwegians were consecrated by the archbishop and sent to the see of Hólar might not have been favoured by the local clergy, especially since Auðunn had a very good relationship with the king who had been on the side of the Icelandic laymen and against the clergy in their struggle of *staðamál*.

Bishop Auðunn Þorbergsson was a Norwegian, a candidate elected by the cathedral chapter from among themselves. He was a highly experienced man, who had been (among others) the leader of the chapter opposition against Archbishop Jörundr at the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth century. Magnús Stefánsson has suggested that Bishop Auðunn was most probably one of King Hákon's most reliable supporters till the day of his consecration in 1313.⁹⁸ Two aspects need a closer examination here. The first one concerns Auðunn's efforts to acquire more power "from the inside". According to both the saga material and the annals, Bishop Auðunn was determined to strengthen the bishopric according to the Norwegian model and be the king's ambassador. To do this, he collected the inventory books of his see and ordered the construction of new buildings at Hólar (frequently mentioned in the annals) as well as making an effort to popularize the sainthood of Jón and Guðmundr.⁹⁹ *Lárentíus saga* stresses that Auðunn had Guðmundr's bones translated "at the instigation of King Hákon" ("af áeggjan Hákonar konungs"), which is a strong argument.¹⁰⁰ Although Jörundr also allegedly invested in rebuilding the church at Hólar and in popularizing the cult, the portrayal of these things contrasts markedly with Bishop Auðunn's endeavours. Jörundr's attempts at the rearrangement of the cathedral building are only briefly mentioned in *Lárentíus saga*, and his efforts to spread Guðmundr's sanctity only mentioned in *Gjtb* and *GB*. Thus, Bishop Auðunn's success is, generally speaking, contrasted with Jörundr's defeat in these two areas. When *Gjtb* was incorporated into *GB*, the miracle stories remained unchanged. The author of *GC*, Bergr Sökkason, elaborated on the story. It is problematic to estimate his relationship or eventual co-operation with Einarr Hafliðason, the

⁹⁸ The argument might be the fact that in 1309 Auðunn was the king's treasurer (Magnús Stefánsson, 'Frá goðakirkju', p. 230).

⁹⁹ Auðunn's initiative to expand Jón Ögmundarsson's cult and to have a new timber building and an altar made at Hólar are mentioned in *Lárentíus saga* A ch. 30 and B, ch. 35. *Annal* VII, *sub anno* 1314 and X, *sub anno* 1315 mention the timber house as well.

¹⁰⁰ *Lárentíus saga* A, ch. 30 and B, ch. 35.

author of *Lárentíus saga* and *Annal VII* but it should not be surprising that they used the same motif. However positive the portrayal of Bishop Jörundr in *GC* may seem at first, I would argue that all the sources depict his role in Guðmundr's cult much less favourably than Auðunn's.

Another aspect I find interesting is Bishop Auðunn's generosity and hospitality, praised highly in *Lárentíus saga*, as well as his positive attitude towards his opponents.¹⁰¹ Charters present the bishop in a slightly different light. To exercise his "generosity" Auðunn Þorbergsson needed to raise his income, which resulted in a letter issued by the northerners (unwilling to be exploited) to the Norwegian King in 1319.¹⁰² The royal response, from King Magnús Eiríksson, was definitely in favour of the laymen. Shortly afterwards Auðunn left Iceland and never returned (he died in Norway 1322). It is rather tempting to compare these particular accounts with the source material on Guðmundr Arason: there seems to be a striking similarity between Bishop Auðunn and the saint he promoted.

8.3.3. Ormr Ásláksson's initiative

Annal V, *sub anno* 1344, describes the event the following way: "Bishop Guðmundr's bones were elevated at Hólar and washed by Bishop Ormr as a result of miracles. The cloth in which they had been wrapped thirty winters after the last washing was found undamaged".¹⁰³ The date is approximate as Auðunn's *translatio* is elsewhere dated to 1315, and not 1314, so the author's (or compiler's) flexible use of calendar must be taken into consideration in this case.

As far as this story is concerned, the annalistic record is the only one preserved, which actually puts that event in doubt. Ormr Ásláksson, the third Hólar bishop whose name is associated with the spread of Guðmundr's cult, began his ecclesiastical career as a monk in Stavanger. As soon as he arrived in Iceland after the consecration in 1343, he entered into a conflict with the regular canons at Möðruvellir.¹⁰⁴ In

¹⁰¹ *Lárentíus saga A*, ch. 30 and *Lárentíus saga B*, ch. 36.

¹⁰² *DI II*, 337.

¹⁰³ "Tekin vpp bein Guðmundar byskups at Holum ok þvegin af Ormi Byskupi fyrir iarteinir. ok dukr sa er vm hafdi legit. xxx. vetra síðan næst er þvegin voru var með óllu ófuinn ok hvergi vólnaðr".

¹⁰⁴ Jón Sigurðsson, the bishop of Skálholt consecrated at the same time, had a dispute with monks at Þykkvibær. According to *Lögmanns-annáll* (VII), *sub anno*

1345 Ormr went to Norway and came back with a warrant from the king that declared royal protection over Ormr and his possessions. At the same time all the laymen in power were instructed to support the Church, the bishop and his people.¹⁰⁵ It might be assumed that the king wanted to support the bishop against the Northerners with the letter. The response came some time later: according to the annals the *bishops* dealt harshly with people and the Icelanders considered themselves rather suppressed.¹⁰⁶ The Northerners held a meeting against Bishop Ormr and at the general assembly in 1347 composed a letter to Magnús Eiríksson. The issues addressed were the large number of people who followed the bishop during visitations (strikingly similar to Guðmundr Arason's main "fault") in addition to the duty of mass and tithe. The bishop realized that things had gone too far and at Hegransþingi in 1347 declared that he would keep the old laws. However, there was a very negative attitude towards Ormr at the meeting and both he and the bishop of Skálholt, Jón Sigurðsson, left for Norway. Jón returned to Iceland in 1348, but Ormr stayed in Norway. Jón went to Hólar and tried to achieve reconciliation with the Northerners on behalf of Ormr, but the laymen would not agree.¹⁰⁷

Ormr only returned to Iceland in 1351. On 19 October 1354 the Norwegian king issued a letter which confirmed the use of Árni's Christian law and in 1358 the Icelandic Church finally achieved its goal of *libertas ecclesiae*.¹⁰⁸ Of all the bishops of Hólar supposedly involved in popularizing Guðmundr Arason's cult, Ormr was probably the least fortunate one. The fact that the ritual of washing Guðmundr's bones, which he is supposed to have initiated is only mentioned in one little

1343, Bishop Ormr had some of the monks imprisoned ("kastade suma j myrkua stofu"). The reasons are not explicitly stated, but another comment that follows this one concerns Ormr's management at Hólar: the bishop spent all the money which had been collected by Bishop Egill Eyjólfsson (1332–41) and Einarr Hafliðason ("spente hann fast Hóla kirkju godze þui sem þeir herra Egill byskop ok sira Einar Hafliða son hofdu vndir komit"). *Annal* IX comments, "Hóla byskup fangadi .iij. brædr a Modru vllum ok iarnadi fyrir þær sakir hann gaf þeim".

¹⁰⁵ *DI* II, 833.

¹⁰⁶ My italics. "Byskupar a Islandi gerduz sua hardir uid lannz folkid ok toku af monnum penga sua at menn uarla unndir bua" (*Annal* VI), "A þui aare gerduzst byskopar hardir miogh vidr lærda ok leika aa Islande" (*Annal* VII).

¹⁰⁷ As *Annal* VII reports, "ok villdu at ongum koste vndir hann leggja edr sættazst vidr þa Orm biskop". See also *Annal* IX.

¹⁰⁸ On 19 July 1358 the archbishop's emissaries Eyjólf Brandsson (a member of the cathedral chapter in Niðaróss) and Monk Eysteinn Ásgrímsson finally reached consensus between the clergy and laymen (*DI* III, 120.).

reliable source is not very convincing. The years 1342–5 were a very difficult period for Ormr, and one might wonder how successful such an event would be in this kind of situation. On the other hand, if the opening of the coffin and the washing of the bones was only a symbolic act of confirmation of the miracles already accounted, its significance might have disappeared among other current events. Like Auðunn, Ormr was focused on the enrichment of the see. During Auðunn's episcopacy the secular leaders of the North turned against the bishop's greed and sought the king's help, while during Ormr's episcopacy both the king and the Church went hand in hand as the northerners accepted the same Church Law that was earlier held at Skálholt. Interestingly, it should be noticed that this bishop shared Guðmundr Arason's fate in one certain aspect. Ormr was formally accused by the laymen of the North of being too much of a burden together with his large following during the visitations. As discussed in the previous chapter, that was one of the main reasons for the enmity that met Guðmundr in the Northern quarter during his life.

Like Auðunn's "generosity", Ormr's large following caused irritation among the northerners. In those aspects both bishops were likened to Guðmundr, though the similarity is based on contrasts, neither of them is referred to as a saint, no miracles are reported and their acts were, according to the sources, based on cold calculation.

8.3.4. *Jón Eiríksson's vow*

Another Norwegian bishop involved in the cult of Guðmundr was supposed to be Jón Eiríksson *skalli*, who made three vows to Guðmundr in the second half of the fourteenth century. His involvement in Guðmundr's cult is known from non-narrative evidence only. The vow from 2 February 1365 was made on behalf of the bishop and all the Northerners to the Virgin Mary, Jón of Hólar, Guðmundr *góði* and all the saints to obtain relief from disastrous weather conditions.¹⁰⁹ In return, Virgin Mary's *Festum Conceptionis* was supposed to be commemorated on 8 December from that time on with fasting, prayers and donations to the poor.¹¹⁰ In an interesting passage Jón Eiríksson refers to another vow to Guðmundr made some time earlier:

¹⁰⁹ *DI* III 174., p. 207.

¹¹⁰ It is not clear whether Jón's vow was the cause or the result of adoption of the feast at the general assembly as a Holy Day of Obligation in 1364 (Cormack, *The*

Her með minnum wer áá. alla menn þaa sem j þi heite vaaru sem nærst var heitit til hins goda guðmundar at þer endir þat velok afhennidir. þeim er til skipadr vidrtoku so at ver allir samt megði skoda hvort wer uilium gera með þi godze mann aa pafuagard edr skiptiz þat mille fáátækra sem heitit var. þi at þat er mikill sááluhááske at heita þi gude edr hans helgum monnum sem hann vill sidan eighi efna sakir vanræktar.¹¹¹

Annal VII contains an interesting entry dated to 1376:

Vetr suo hardr at vm allar sveitir var komit at falli fenadr j mot langa fustu fyrir nordan land. hietv jnir fremstv menn bæði lærdir ok lækir nordan landz jn translaccione *sancte* (!) *Johannis til aarnadar ordz vid enn goda Gvdmund byskup Arason* at gefva alin af hverio hvndradi til þers at lata fara til pafva gardz at þat sysladiz at hann skipadiz j samlag heilagra manna skipadiz vid þetta heit hardla vel svo at skiotliga batnadi vard ok eingin fiar fellir þav misseri.¹¹²

A similar entry is to be found in *Annal IX* with the date 1377:

[...] hetu menn þa fyrir nordan land a Guðmund byskup til aarnadar ordz með samþycki Jons byskups at gefa alin af hueriu hundradi ok fara með a pafa gard at tekin yrði vpp helgi hans¹¹³

These two entries are very interesting because they seem at first to refer to the same vow. However, in the former both Jón Ögmundarson and Guðmundr Arason are addressed, while the latter only mentions Guðmundr. The vow from *Annal VII* focuses on the initiative of northern clergy and laymen, while *Annal IX* adds Bishop Jón *skalli's*

Saints in Iceland, pp. 126–9). Nevertheless, the observance of that day at Hólar after 1365 is not well documented and it is difficult to say whether the bishop fulfilled his promise.

¹¹¹ “We remind all the men who had participated in making the vow to Guðmundr the Good that you should keep it and make the donation. The goal of the payment is charity and we all may decide what should be done with the donations, whether it should be sent to the pope or distributed among the poor as previously agreed in the vow. For it is a great perdition to make a vow to God or his saints and not to keep it because of a disregard”.

¹¹² “The winter was so hard in all the northern districts before Lent that cattle died. The most noble men, both laymen and clerics, vowed to Bishop Guðmundr Arason the Good on the anniversary of Saint Jón’s *translatio* to donate an ell of each hundred. [The offerings] would be sent to the pope with the request of including him [Guðmundr] among the saints. As soon as the vow was made the weather improved and no more cattle fell that season”.

¹¹³ “[...] men in the north [of Iceland] made a vow to Bishop Guðmundr on the anniversary of his death with Bishop Jón’s consent to donate an ell of each hundred and send [the offering] to the pope with the request of canonization [of Guðmundr]”. See also Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 102.

approval. It is possible that the name Jón has caused confusion among the copyists, also the dates are debatable.¹¹⁴

Jón Eiríksson was a Norwegian, first consecrated as bishop of Greenland when the false information about the death of Árni, the former bishop of Greenland, reached Norway.¹¹⁵ Having waited for Bishop Árni's actual death for seven years, Jón decided to abandon the idea and applied for the episcopacy at Hólar instead. To be able to achieve that, he had to apply to the *curia* in Avignon and ask Pope Innocent VI (p. 1352–62) for permission. Jón returned to Norway and maintained that permission had been granted him and, although he was not able to present any documents, the archbishop consecrated him as bishop of Hólar.¹¹⁶ The northern Icelandic clergy did not receive him well. The priest Þorsteinn Hallsson openly refused to accept "the bishop of Greenland" and managed to gain a lot of followers among the Northerners, especially in Eyjafjörður. To what extent the knowledge of Jón's not quite authorized consecration was widespread in the Northern quarter is difficult to say. Since a visit to Niðaróss to obtain help from the archbishop was hardly efficient, Jón Eiríksson was forced to have a meeting with the pope in order to obtain the documents. After the successful journey the bishop's (now the proper Hólar bishop) situation stabilized.

Thus, a certain pattern emerges when all the Hólar bishops involved into the cult of Guðmundr are considered together. Auðunn, Ormr and Jón were of Norwegian descent. Although contact between Norway and Iceland was not as tense as one might expect such a relationship to have been, the areas of Skagafjörður and Eyjafjörður probably remained quite distinct regions and their inhabitants might have been reluctant to accept "outsiders". Of all the Hólar bishops, both Icelandic and Norwegian, in the period 1237–1400, these three men succeeded in maintaining a relatively powerful position.¹¹⁷ They were

¹¹⁴ Both entries refer most probably to the vow made by Bishop Jón Eiríksson on 2 February 1365. It had been suggested that the letter should be dated to 1375, but this assumption has been rejected (see *DI* III, 174., the introductory note on p. 207).

¹¹⁵ His patronymic is unknown.

¹¹⁶ Annals that report the issue in details are: VI, VII, VIII, IX, see also Jón Helgason, *Íslands Kirke*, p. 195.

¹¹⁷ After Guðmundr's death the bishops at Hólar were as follows: Bótólfr (1238–47), Norwegian; Heinrekr Kársson (1247–60), Norwegian; Brandr Jónsson (1263–4), Icelandic; Jörundr Þorsteinsson (1267–1313), Icelandic; Auðunn Þorbergsson (1313–22), Norwegian; Lárentius Kálfsson (1324–31), Icelandic; Egill Eyjólfsson (1332–41), Icelandic; Ormr Ásláksson (1342–56), Norwegian; Jón Eiríksson (1358–90), Norwegian.

also involved in conflicts with the Northerners, both the clergy and the laymen. They might have looked to the authority of Guðmundr Arason, first, hoping to gain popularity in the locality, and second, looking up to him as their patron. At the same time, their contemporaries and Guðmundr's hagiographers had a good opportunity to write about a positive example, in their view, that of Guðmundr, who was accused of similar "trespasses".

In Jón's case it was very symbolic, but like Auðunn and Ormr he also might have hoped for the acceptance of the Northern clergy. As far as Jörundr is concerned, the authors who mention his "initiative" might have tried to put an Icelander first in that competition. Admittedly this hypothesis is not fully supported and the question must remain open. It is not certain that Ormr's act of washing the relics actually took place; however, the arguments for it can be accepted. Besides, it must be borne in mind that Jörundr's dubious role as depicted in all the sources might have had roots in the bishop's conflict with the environment from which the authors of the account of his initiative derived. It cannot be stated with certainty that they were educated at Þingeyrar or worked there. If so, the fact that Jörundr decided to take back the share of the episcopal tithe that had been given to the monastery by Jón Ögmundarson and his successors, could not be perceived as positive by them.¹¹⁸ Also, his acquisition of the whale that had been the share of the needy in Skagafjörður (discussed in the previous chapter) could not provide him with positive opinion. The account in *GC* seems to be the only one that provides a more positive portrayal of Jörundr. However, the description of the bishop's tactic is not free of dubious remarks. His idea of hiding Guðmundr's relics from the faithful is not entirely convincing, which might suggest that Bergr Sokkason shared the sceptical attitude of the other authors.

The fate of Jón Ögmundarson's or Þorlákr Þórhallsson's relics, when compared to that of Guðmundr's, is strikingly different. The translations seem to have been performed without any problems. Þorlákr's nephew Páll elevated the holy bishop's relics and gave formal permission for vows to Þorlákr at the general assembly of 1198.¹¹⁹ Þorlákr's relics were formally translated to the cathedral on July 20, and his feast

The last bishop of Hólar in the fourteenth century was Pétur Nikulásson (1391–1411), a Dane.

¹¹⁸ *Lárentíus saga* A, ch. 39 and B, ch. 49.

¹¹⁹ *Þorláks saga* A, ch. 23 and B, ch. 42.

adopted as a Holy Day of Obligation the following year. The saga has it that Bishop Páll had an expensive shrine made for the relics, and that he was able to do that thanks to the income resulting from offerings.¹²⁰ Bishop Magnús Gizurarson undertook a second translation in 1229. In 1292 Þorlákr's relics were translated again, probably as a result of reconstruction in the cathedral.¹²¹

The co-operation of the northern and the southern bishoprics in this case is rather striking, and one might even speak of northern initiative in this case, as has been mentioned earlier. The sagas, both concerning Þorlákr and Guðmundr, contain passages that almost suggest the mutual support of both holy men: Guðmundr was present at the translation of Þorlákr's bones and Þorlákr's former chaplain discussed the bishop's saintliness with Guðmundr.¹²²

It was Guðmundr Arason's wish that Gunnlaugr Leifsson write a saga on Jón of Hólar as well. Jón Ögmundarsson's translation and the construction of his sanctity was a natural consequence of those events.¹²³ On 16 December 1198 Bishop Brandr had Jón's and Bishop Björn Gilsson's bones exhumed, washed and transferred to new coffins which were placed under a vault but not covered with earth.¹²⁴ The water with which Jón's relics had been washed was carefully preserved and soon bore witness to his sanctity by curing a number of ailments. In the winter of 1199–1200 Jón's appearance in a dream indicated that further action should be taken, and his relics were formally translated to Hólar cathedral on 3 March. His feast was adopted as a Holy Day of Obligation at the general assembly in 1200.

GB mentions "*bréf*" that had burnt together with the church at Laufás in 1258, and the context might suggest that these were documents prepared to compose a complete *vita* and, perhaps, start the canonization process of Guðmundr.¹²⁵ The author wrote that "none of

¹²⁰ "Þá er Pállr byskupi þótti nökkut samnask ok samandragask fjárhltr sá er menn gáfu af góðvilja inum sæla Þorláki byskupi, þá syndic hann þat brátt hvat honum bjó í skapi" (*Páls saga*, ch. 7).

¹²¹ *Annal IV* and *Annal IX* for this year state that Þorlákr was "enshrined". It has been suggested that this reflects a translation after the rebuilding of the choir by Bishop Árni, begun in 1277 (Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 165, ft. 490).

¹²² Guðmundr's involvement in spreading Jón's sanctity is referred to in several passages of *Jóns saga*: chs. 24, 34 and 63.

¹²³ Chs. 133–177 from the C version of *Þorláks saga* contain, among others, the record of a few visions which had supposedly been sent by Guðmundr Arason to the monk Gunnlaugr Leifsson. See also Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 116.

¹²⁴ There is no record of miracles attributed to Björn Gilsson.

¹²⁵ GB, ch. 82.

the like was written later”.¹²⁶ Two annals mention a fire at the church at Laufás in 1258, which would, indeed, mark an early start of the process.¹²⁷ Stefán Karlsson has suggested that the word “bréf” has a wider meaning of a “small written work”, which might mean additional material to the saga.¹²⁸

The absence of Auðunn’s translation and Ormr’s initiative from *Guðmundar sögur* is quite problematic. In *GA* the incompleteness of the account of the bishop’s life might be the explanation. In *GC* the story about Jörundr’s secret burial of the relics might have originally been followed by the story of Auðunn’s *translatio*, perhaps known to the author from *Lárentíus saga* and the annal entries, as Peter G. Foote suggests.¹²⁹ As far as *GD* is concerned, the reason might have been the demands of both the audience, elsewhere in Europe, and possibly the pope. It has been suggested that all the accounts of miracles and *translatio* might have had to be recorded in a separate document, and not as a part of a *vita*.¹³⁰ So were, most probably, the translations.

8.4. After the translations

8.4.1. Posthumous miracles

The miracle book as well as *GB* and *GD* list an impressive number of Guðmundr’s posthumous miracles, although, as mentioned above,

¹²⁶ “Bar ok sva til vm þat er menn hófðu fiolda brefa ritað ok ieinn stad komit i Lafas kirkiv ok brvn þa þar iNi oll ikirkiv brvna envm ok mvnv þa alldri síþan ritin verða” (*GB*, ch. 82).

¹²⁷ *Annals* IV, p. 132 and V, p. 192.

¹²⁸ Stefán Karlsson, ‘Guðmundar sögur biskups’, p. 156. The idea was first presented by Magnús Jónsson (Jón Jóhannesson, *Sts* II, p. xxix) and is often quoted (e.g. Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 100 and Whaley, ‘Miracles in the Sagas of Bishops’, p. 161).

¹²⁹ Foote, ‘Bishop Jörundr’, pp. 111–2.

¹³⁰ The issue of canonization process in the later Middle Ages has been thoroughly discussed by e.g. Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Middle Ages*, Eric Waldrum Kemp, *Canonization and Authority in the Western Church*. Oxford Historical Series, ed. by F.M. Powicke, B.H. Sumner (London: Oxford University Press, Geoffrey Cumberlege, 1948) and *Procès de canonisation au Moyen Âge : aspects juridiques et religieux*, red. by Gábor Klaniczay, Collection de l’École française de Rome, 340 (Rome: l’École française de Rome, 2004). As far as Northern Europe is concerned, a few Swedish cases have been discussed by Anders Fröjmark in his doctoral thesis *Mirakler och helgonkult. Linköpings bispedöme under senmedeltiden*. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Studia Historica Upsaliensia 171, ed. by Carl Göran Andræ (Uppsala : University of Uppsala/ Institute of History, 1992).

establishing a precise chronological order of all the stories is difficult.¹³¹ In several cases (which are listed right after Jörundr's exhumation of Guðmundr's bones in *Jarteinabók* and may, therefore, be considered posthumous) consecrated water was used as a means to heal wounds and diseases of both animals and men, extinguish the fire at Hólar, keep the beneficiary from hunger or bring a child back to life. In a few cases (all of them being cures) the suppliants applied it in addition to making a vow, but in general vows were the means used in the majority of cases to achieve the goal, a miraculous solution to a problem. The main feature characteristic of Guðmundr's posthumous miracles is the diminished frequency of the use of the consecrated water.

GJtb and *GB* contain an interesting story which might serve as a partial explanation to that phenomenon. At Hóll in Rangárvellir a man appeared to an injured boy in a dream and asked him to send his mother for some water consecrated by Guðmundr.¹³² The boy tried to explain that the well had been closed by "Bishop Árni", but this was not taken by the dream man as an excuse.¹³³ The boy's aunt eventually went to look for the well; as people dug in the ground while praying, they found it. It is not clear from the context whether it was Bishop Árni Þorláksson or Bishop Árni Helgason (bp. 1304–20) who, according to the story, objected to the existence of the well. Both had been bishops of Skálholt. Since Hóll was located very close to the see, the bishop might have been dissatisfied with this form of veneration or Guðmundr's growing popularity, the latter of which might eclipse Þorlák's fame. The bishop mentioned in the text was most probably Árni Þorláksson whose efforts in defending the rights and property of the Church were so efficient. There is no evidence for the existence of any Icelandic statutes or laws that would forbid the use of the consecrated water. The practice was, as discussed in the previous chapters, rather common all across Europe.¹³⁴ Yet the veneration of

¹³¹ Since the authors of particular narratives do not keep the same number and order of the miracles, it is very difficult to decide which ones are *in vita* and which posthumous unless Guðmundr's presence is mentioned. I have decided to rely on the miracle book and consider all the miracles listed after the "coffin incident" dated to the period of Jörundr's episcopacy as posthumous.

¹³² *GJtb*, ch. 28, *GB* ch. 142.

¹³³ "Þorvaldr svarar. 'Það bannar Árni byskup, ok er niðr laginn brunnrinn'." (*GJtb*, ch. 28 and *GB* ch. 142).

¹³⁴ A few early medieval synods had discussed the significance of wells as sacred sites quite frequently, until the Council of Trèves in 1227, but it was mainly directed against the remnants of heathen belief and the cult of water as such. However, the

a well might either have seemed too unorthodox, or even heathen, to Árni Þorláksson, or the story is simply an attempt to show scepticism towards Guðmundr's miraculous powers even after his death. The bishop issued a few orders (*boðskapr*) during his episcopacy, two of which concern the use of consecrated water; one of them forbids priests to baptize a child without water, and the other one reads, "Eigi skulu olærdir menn uatn uigia".¹³⁵ *Olærdir menn* must refer here to laymen who found no difficulties in disposing of water, perhaps from Guðmundr's wells. The quotation clearly indicates that the act of consecration by *olærdir menn* was practiced, and that would mean that people (laymen) did it themselves. The practice of blessing objects and places with water by laymen in the absence of a priest or a bishop was, in fact, allowed in Europe in the early Middle Ages.¹³⁶ However, the water itself was supposed to be previously consecrated by the clergy. It is possible that this custom was practiced in Iceland in the thirteenth century, but written sources do not depict it as a regular practice or a problem. Thus, unless the passage in Árni Þorláksson's order was meant to deal with some particularly unorthodox use of water by people, it is difficult to establish any solid connection between this order and Guðmundr's cult.

Nevertheless, the narratives concerning Guðmundr do not leave any doubt about the miraculous properties of the water previously consecrated by the saint and the fact that it was in use. In one case it was even used to make fire—the paradoxical situation being an inevitable proof of the water's unique nature and of Guðmundr's posthumous saintliness.¹³⁷ None of the extant imported *vitae* reveals such an exceptional attachment of a certain saint to consecrated water. There are quite a few stories that mention the consecrated oil, *viðsmjör*, in the sagas devoted to Benedict,¹³⁸ Martin¹³⁹ or Nicholas,¹⁴⁰ but water still seems

use of water coming from springs associated with saints' cult seems to have been encouraged by the Church authorities all across Europe (Ch. Daxelmüller, 'Wasser. Volkskunde', p. 2064; Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. by Rosemary Sheed (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), p. 200.

¹³⁵ *DI* II, 7, dated to September 1269.

¹³⁶ See 4.2.1. above.

¹³⁷ The fire was made with a twirling awl dipped in the holy water (*GJtb*, ch. 34 and *GB*, ch. 144j).

¹³⁸ *Benedictus saga*, chs. 31 and 32.

¹³⁹ *E.g. Martinus saga byskups* I, chs. 16, 21 (where an angel applies some to St Martin), 37, 38 and 39.

¹⁴⁰ *E.g. Nikolaus saga erkibyskups* I, chs. 5, 9 and 11.

to be the means favoured by hagiographers. *Nikolaus saga* I contains an interesting description of a posthumous miracle that provided the faithful with two types of relics (and remedies): “En or steinþro hans fliota .ii. heilsubrunnar, vidsmiors brudr af hofdi, en annaa brunnr vatz af fotum, ok fa heilsu siukir menn, er þvi vidsmiorvi eru smurdir edr af þvi vatni bergia”.¹⁴¹ *Blasius saga* contains an interesting passage in the context of the “water ordeal”:

[...] þa mun þo Cristr minn syna crafst sinn á vatni, þviat crafr hans er [opt syndr í vatnom; þott [vatnn þvai ęgi syndir af oss fyrir helgan anda, þa ero margar oc miklar aþrar iarteinir, þer er gorzk hafa á vatnom. Þa er drottin va þessa heims i licam, þa gek hann þurrom fotom of sia sem á landi, oc baþ hann Petro postola sinom at coma til sin oc ganga á sio. En þat ma hann veita mer enom minzta þreli sinom, sem hann veitti enom øzta postola sinom.¹⁴²

No other means seems to have attracted as much attention of hagiographers as water, and Guðmundr’s miracle working is yet another example of it.

What could, then, be the reason for its diminished presence in the posthumous miracles (other than some official ban on its use, which does not seem to have been the case)? Holy water was used mainly in curative miracles, but it was not the only means to heal or restore people and animals to life; hence, the use of new “methods”, including secondary relics, could not serve as a satisfactory explanation (one of the healings included the use of Guðmundr’s hat: a man named Snorri Magnússon who suffered from a severe eye problem put it on before going to bed and woke up cured).¹⁴³ If one assumes that people had access to holy water, it is also possible to state that it was so common that the authors only noted the most spectacular cases. Still another explanation is the importance of the provision of food miracles, which

¹⁴¹ “Two healing wells gushed from his grave: consecrated oil at his head and water at his feet. The sick were cured either by being anointed with the oil or by drinking the water” (ch. 12).

¹⁴² “[...] Christ must wish to reveal his might through water because his power is often revealed this way; although Holy Spirit does not wash away our sins through water, there are many other mighty miracles which are worked through water. When the Lord lived in this world in a human body he walked with dry feet on [the surface of] the sea as if he were walking on the ground, and he asked His Apostle Peter to come to him and to walk on [the surface of] the sea. And He [Christ] must grant more [miraculous power] to His humblest slaves than He did to His greatest Apostles” (*Blasius saga*, ch. 115).

¹⁴³ *GJtb*, ch. 32 and *GB*, ch. 144e.

attracted more attention from the scribes. Finally, as a deceased saint, Guðmundr appeared more often and intervened by the use of divine power directly from the source; hence, underlining the importance of water in each and every miracle story seemed no longer necessary to the authors.

The biographies of the Icelandic holy bishops provide quite a number of different examples of their posthumous apparitions. Þorlákr appeared to people who were dreaming, but also those who were in a state of drowsiness. He could appear to a large number of people: sometimes just seeing the deceased bishop was beneficial enough for the suffering man or woman, and no rituals or acts were required.¹⁴⁴ In many cases the saint came in order to instruct and reproach, which is rather characteristic of him and sometimes just to bring relief by blessing the beneficiary or touching him/her.¹⁴⁵ According to the posthumous miracle stories that testify to Jón Ögmundarson's holiness, he appeared to people in different circumstances. Except for the cases in which the anchoress Hildr played the main part, and which may be classified as exorcisms, Jón came twice to the beneficiaries whom he intended to help in order to instruct them about the exchange of favours. A man named Kálfr was told how to pray to please the deceased bishops and a woman named Þórdís was informed that her cow would regain health if she would commemorate the saint once a day while performing her usual duties.¹⁴⁶ In a few of Jón's miracle stories Þorlákr appears to the beneficiaries and his appearance is, like in many cases known from narratives devoted to him, associated with reproachful messages. He informed the faithful that people should not always expect to be provided with help by him as there were many other [holy] men with greater merits, whose holiness is preserved in miracles.¹⁴⁷

Contrary to Þorlákr and Jón, Guðmundr is not recorded as appearing in many dreams or visions to instruct or reprimand people who needed

¹⁴⁴ See e.g. the case of a man named Unas in *Þorláks saga A*, chs. 24–32, who was healed by witnessing the apparition of Þorlákr, or of a woman who was cured in the same way and whose story is reported in *Bjtb*, ch. 44.

¹⁴⁵ See e.g. the story of a man named Óláfr who had pain in his foot and was cured when Þorlákr appeared to him and stroked his foot (*Þorláks saga B*, chs. 108–14).

¹⁴⁶ *JS*, ch. 64j.

¹⁴⁷ “Eigi skulu þér undra þat, þó at ek láta eigi at hvers manns áheiti, með því at fleiri menn eru enn mikilla verðleika, ok er annat öðrum til handa varðveitt í jartegnum” (*JS*, ch. 25).

help. Interestingly, the early fourteenth-century sagas and Arngrímr's version contain different examples of stories in which Guðmundr's apparition has been recorded. According to *GD*, Guðmundr appeared to the recipients of his miracles three times, each time to a woman/girl. The case from the West Fjords is a chastisement type of story. Yngvildr Magnúsdóttir suffered from a *vatnormr* because she had forgotten to cross herself before drinking the infected water. The custom of making the sign of the cross before a meal had already been introduced by Jón Ögmundarson, if *Jóns saga helga* is to be trusted.¹⁴⁸ The girl's negligence was punished. However, since she called on Guðmundr and asked him for help, he healed her.¹⁴⁹ Only in one case can a correspondence between the posthumous apparitions of Guðmundr and the other two Icelandic holy bishops be observed on the basis of Þorfinna's case and the story of Yngvildr from the West Fjords described by Arngrímr.¹⁵⁰ These are the "chastisement" type stories, like those in which the direct posthumous intervention of Jón and Þorlákr is recorded. The Icelandic hagiographical material concerning native saints does not provide many examples of illnesses caused by sinful behaviour which the holy bishops were unable to cure or did not want to cure. One example could be the story about a man suffering from epilepsy and pain in the eyes. Þorlákr, whom he saw while in a state of unconsciousness, explained to him that the illness was the result of cardinal sins. Having regained consciousness, the man went to confession and was immediately cured.¹⁵¹ It seems that that by describing the cases in which prayers or vows of the suppliants did not result in improvement the authors usually focused on the aforementioned "rule of the calendar" or "rule of the story". However, the concept of the limited abilities of saints and the Augustinian idea of never taking heavenly intervention for granted is frequently underlined in this context.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ "[maðrinn [...] skyldi] taka aldregi svá mat eða svefn eða drykk at maðr signi sik eigi áðr" (*JS*, ch. 8).

¹⁴⁹ *GD*, ch. 83.

¹⁵⁰ A poor woman (most probably a beggar) named Þorfinna was reproached for her negligence of Christian habits (*JS*, ch. 63). Her case is far more complex than that of Yngvildr, but comparable. When Þorlákr appears to her, he says (among other things): "Þú vanðisk lítt at syngja fyrir mat þinn [...] Nú frá þessi stundu syng jafnan fyrir þeim þrjár Pater noster áðr þú takir til matar þíns".

¹⁵¹ *ÞB*, chs. 93–8.

¹⁵² Illness as punishment in the Icelandic hagiographical material has been discussed e.g. by Ásdís Egilsdóttir, 'Jarteinir líkami, sál og trúarlíf', pp. 15–6.

The phrase used most commonly in posthumous miracle stories is “Guðmundr’s water”, and the context does not always specify what kind of water it was. Only the “*vatnormr* story” mentions specifically *beinavatn* (that is: water that had been used in the process of translation, in which the saint’s bones were washed) but that does not exclude the possibility of the use of this relic more frequently. Thus, it is difficult to establish the exact number of miracles in which water from a consecrated well was reportedly used, and in how many cases the water mentioned was the water left after translation or even Bishop Ormr’s washing of the relics.

In many European miracle collections the resurrections grew in number in the fourteenth century and constituted as much as ten percent of the miracles. As Diana Whaley has observed, the cases of resurrection in the Icelandic miracle collections are not always obvious. The context or the way the beneficiary’s state is described often points to a temporary coma or concussion.¹⁵³ A good illustration here could be the story of a priest named Ljótr Refsson from Árnes at Strandir/Trékyllisvík who spoke ill about Guðmundr Arason.¹⁵⁴ He failed to take seriously the bishop’s ability to turn plain water into water with miraculous properties by blessing it and demonstrated his scepticism during a meeting concerning this subject, at which Guðmundr’s friend Ásgrímr of Kallaðarnes was present. The priest was severely punished for his attitude, like a few other skeptics before him; his son was found unconscious that same day at the seaside, and “everyone thought he was dead” (“ok sýndist öllum hann dauðr”).¹⁵⁵ At the suggestion of other people (a farmer referred to as Guðmundr’s friend, specifically), the priest made a vow and agreed to pour some of Guðmundr’s holy water over his son’s head and chest, and the boy immediately showed signs of life.

It is nearly impossible to detect any patterns in the posthumous healing miracles of the Icelandic bishops because the “methods” and the means used vary from story to story. Curative miracles constitute the majority: men, women, but also a lot of children are the recipients.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Whaley, ‘Miracles in the Sagas of Bishops’, p. 173.

¹⁵⁴ *GJtb*, ch. 25; *GB*, ch. 139; *GD*, ch. 89.

¹⁵⁵ *GD*: “ok sjá engi lífsmörk með honum” (“and [they] didn’t see any sign of life in him”).

¹⁵⁶ Skórzewska, ‘Sveinn einn ungr’. The types of cases resemble those from miracle collections composed in other parts of Western Christendom (see e.g. Michael E. Goodich, *Violence and Miracle in the Fourteenth Century. Private Grief and Public*

In contrast with the Icelandic family sagas or the *Sturlunga saga* compilation, miracle stories provide numerous examples of unconditional parental love and care. The miracles for children constitute only a small percentage of the sources on the three Icelandic saints and do not seem to have any decisive influence on the image of any of the saints: it cannot be said that any of them specialised in helping children or healing illnesses or results of accidents. Although children constituted as much as forty-two percent of the beneficiaries of all the Icelandic miracles, the majority are attributed to Þorlákr, not Guðmundr.¹⁵⁷ The biggest number of the cases of direct intervention, however, has been attributed to Guðmundr.¹⁵⁸ Since the majority of his miracles for children were performed *in vita*, he often prevented possible misfortunes from happening rather than dealing with their results.

8.4.2. *The relics in focus*

According to many European miracle collections from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, miracles usually took place away from shrines, and often even away from any relic.¹⁵⁹ The beneficiary reported the miracle when making a subsequent pilgrimage to give thanks and bring an offering. The miracle itself was normally preceded, if not actually triggered, by a vow to make a pilgrimage. The vow, which was very often conditional on a successful outcome, could be made by the sufferer or on his/her behalf, especially if a child was involved. As demonstrated above, in the source material on Guðmundr Arason we only find five examples of a pilgrimage resulting from vows made exactly according to this principle (four of which are recorded in the youngest source, *GD*). A thanksgiving pilgrimage to Hólar was vowed

Salvation (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995); Ronald C. Finucane, *The Rescue of the Innocents. Endangered Children in Medieval Miracles* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

¹⁵⁷ Whaley, 'Miracles in the Sagas of Bishops', p. 175. That fact is most probably connected with a wider and more intense spread of that saint's cult.

¹⁵⁸ Skórzewska, 'Sveinn einn ungr', p. 118.

¹⁵⁹ Diana Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage, c. 700–c. 1500* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 58, Vauchez, *Sainthood in the later Middle Ages*, pp. 446–8 (according to Vauchez the change happened earlier in Italy and France than in England and Sweden or the Slavic countries. He maintains that the general tendency in the later Middle Ages was the distance between the devotion to saints and the cult of relics, though "in the conditional vows a concrete topographical reference always persisted" (p. 448)).

for curing frostbitten feet (*GJtb*, ch. 34), a difficult pregnancy (*GD*, ch. 80), restoring the eyesight of a baby (*GD*, ch. 82) and getting rid of the *vatnormr* (two stories in *GD*, ch. 83). Otherwise Guðmundr's shrine or place of burial does not seem to be a place of predominant significance for the faithful/the authors.¹⁶⁰ It is rather the wells and springs consecrated by the saint that—being in many cases the best remedy—are approached this way.

The “distance miracles” are quite an old phenomenon and are found in hagiographic material from the earliest times.¹⁶¹ Webb suggests that the change that took place in the later Middle Ages did not mean the enlargement of the area of a cult, but that the saint's power was being invoked in a different, more varied manner within the area of his or her fame (or at least described as such).¹⁶² One possibility does not necessarily exclude the other, depending on the local construction of a cult, the ideas popularised by the clergy and influential politicians or the features required by the procedures of canonization. Guðmundr's sanctity in this particular aspect of being “present” in consecrated wells made him considerably different from Þorlákr or Jón. And still, of the 27 posthumous miracle stories, only seven mention the near presence of his relics: Guðmundr's grave, water in which his bones were washed or water consecrated by him. As mentioned above, none of the sagas concerning Guðmundr provides any information on his shrine, a reliquary or references to its fate after the translations; only Arngrímr's variant mentions the use of *beinavatn* in a miracle story from the West Fjords dated to 1343. An entry in *Annal VIII* dated to 1403 reports that many vows of fasting and prayers to the Virgin Mary were made, and of donations to have Guðmundr's reliquary made.¹⁶³ This is the

¹⁶⁰ Only one miracle story mentions it as a place of cure, see *GJtb*, ch. 34 and *GB*, ch. 144j, the story about Pétur Bjarnarson from Hornafjörður whose body was swollen both on the inside and outside. He called on Guðmundr and from that moment on he felt better and better. In the summer he went to Hólar and was completely cured (“á sama sumri gekk hann til Hóla með heit sitt, ok var hann þá alheill”).

¹⁶¹ The Scandinavian miracle collections which have been analysed by Christian Krötzel illustrate this chronological transition and its nuances (12th–15th centuries. Krötzel, *Pilger, Mirakel und Alltag*), see also Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, pp. 59–61.

¹⁶² Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, p. 62. The trend for the distance miracle might be partly explained by the increased penetration of Christian society by preaching.

¹⁶³ “heitit morgvum fostum og songum og Mariu gongum og gefa til Guðmundar skrins”. The final part of this line might also be interpreted as donations to Guðmundr's

earliest reference to the “shrine” that has been preserved until present day. It refers to two votive letters composed in Northern Iceland on the occasion of plague.¹⁶⁴ One of the letters is from Grenjaðarstaðir and one from Munkaþverá (with the dates 25 December 1402 and 16 January 1403), and only in the passage written at Munkaþverá are prayers to Christ, the Virgin Mary, Guðmundr Arason and all saints are mentioned. Moreover, the letter contains the following promise:

Item i heidur vit hinn göda Gudmund Biskup jätudu aller ad giefu alen
 á hvoriu hundrade i hentugum peningum til þess ad sendebod giorest
 til pavans Gards. þess Erendes. ad pavenn af Guda hiälporlofade ad
 firnefundur hinn gode Gudmundur Arason Biskup være tekenn i samlag
 heilagra manna.¹⁶⁵

The following sentences reveal also the intention of having Guðmundr's reliquary made (“til skrijngiordar”). However, there is no extant source that clearly confirms its arrival at Hólar. *Sigurðarregistri* mentions it among the cathedral's possessions in 1525, and the abundance of documents from the sixteenth century pointing to the efforts of having Guðmundr canonized mean that some kind of reliquary probably existed.¹⁶⁶ It is unknown what kind of reliquary it might have been and who had commissioned (and financed) it.

As far other Icelandic holy bishops are concerned, there is no record of Þorlákr's shrine before 1400 in any *máldagi* or any other document. It is difficult to establish whether it has been lost or destroyed, as the only sources which mention the reliquary's existence are the sagas and, sporadically, the annals. *Annal IX* contains an entry about the miraculous survival of Þorlákr's reliquary in a fire at Skálholt in the first decade of the fourteenth century where everything else was destroyed, but entries from other annals do not support this informa-

shrine (that is, one that already exists), but I find the other option more relevant in this context.

¹⁶⁴ Two plagues are recorded in the medieval Icelandic sources in the years 1402–4 and 1494–5. The mortality rate of the first one was approximately 50–60 percent of the population (Gunnar Karlsson and Helgi Skúli Kjartansson, ‘Plágurnar miklu á Íslandi’, *Saga*, 32 (1994), 11–74).

¹⁶⁵ “In order to make a vow to Bishop Guðmundr the Good everyone has agreed to offer an ell from each hundred in suitable money with the purpose of sending it to the pope with the request that the pope with God's help and grace includes Guðmundr Arason the Good among the holy men.”

¹⁶⁶ See ‘Introduction’ above.

tion.¹⁶⁷ The following annal, for instance, mentions the fire itself but does not refer to the incident with the reliquary at all. The entry might be another attempt to suggest the bishop's holiness.¹⁶⁸ This argument is quite convincing as *Annal* VIII has a strikingly similar entry referring to an accident at Hólar in the year 1393/94, although the sculpture and relics that were saved from the fire are not specified. The documentary evidence might draw our attention to aspects simply copied from foreign sources that, actually, never existed in Iceland. A passage from Árni Þorláksson's Christian Law that mentions the protection of "Þorlák's pilgrims" as one of the Church's responsibilities might be an example of such practice.¹⁶⁹

Jón's reliquary is mentioned for the first time in a *máldagi* of Breiðabólstaður in Fljótshlíð from 1332 as well as in one dated to 1371 ("the hand of holy Jón of Hólar, including the arm").¹⁷⁰ It is difficult to state when and by whom this reliquary was made as *Jóns saga* in the description of *translatio* reports only that "haus ins heilaga Jóns ok öll höfuðbein" were washed and the water from the process carefully preserved by Bishop Brændr Sæmundarson. Auðunn's successor, Bishop Lárentíus, reportedly, had a cup owned by Jón decorated and inscribed, and owned a ring containing a relic of his bone. The ring is mentioned in *Annal* VII, *sub anno* 1330–1332, while the record of the Hólar cathedral's possessions from 1 October 1374 (*DI* III, 235.) and one from 2 May 1396 (*DI* III, 511.) list "Jón's bowl with a lid" ("Jonsbolle med loke"), which supports the information from *Lárentíus saga*. Jón's cult does not seem to have developed very well as the sources reveal. No complete extant inventory book from the diocese of Skálholt is available, and Þorlák's reliquary is not recorded on any extant list of the church's possessions. The saint's grave, as the miracle stories report, was perceived by many as a pilgrimage site, but an organized, mass, regular movement such as those known elsewhere in Europe did not exist.

¹⁶⁷ *Annal* IX, 1308–1310, see Appendix 4.

¹⁶⁸ Quite the opposite, the absence of the reliquary in any documentary evidence throughout the fourteenth century would suggest that the shrine was, in fact, destroyed.

¹⁶⁹ *Kristinréttur Árna Þorlákssonar*, 'Um dóma og prófanir'. In Norwegian version Óláfr was mentioned (*DI* II, 100., p. 230, ft. 5).

¹⁷⁰ "[...] hond hins heilaga iohannis holensis med armleggjum" (*DI* II, 431. and *DI* III, 223.).

The phenomenon of pilgrimage in medieval Europe took various forms. Even subsidiary shrines, centred on secondary relics or on portions of a saint's bones begged or purloined from his or her principal burial place, were important places of pilgrimage. Although competition between shrines is a common motif of miracle stories, their interdependence was often a matter of observable fact.¹⁷¹ There were many shrines which were unlikely to attract the attention of anyone outside the locality were it not that an indulgence was on offer there, and perhaps not even then.¹⁷²

In the Icelandic documentary evidence pilgrims appear rather scarcely, in a legal context that might largely be based on similar documents (or regulations in them) imported from abroad. Those sources establish the responsibility of the clergy for the pilgrims,¹⁷³ instruct the clergy about the confessions of the pilgrims,¹⁷⁴ or their burial (in the particular parish where they died).¹⁷⁵ In law material, *Kristinréttur Árna Þorlákssonar* mentions pilgrimage twice: in a passage on vows ("Um heit") as one of the vows made without a specific reason (the other one being "a vow in need"), and once in the section "Um dóma og prófanir" on the protection of Þorlákr's pilgrims.¹⁷⁶

The evidence concerning indulgences is even more scarce: the first documents are from July 1280 and written on the occasion of a fire in Stavanger.¹⁷⁷ The letters written by two Icelandic bishops Jörundr Þorsteinsson and Árni Þorláksson grant indulgence all those who give their material support to the burnt St. Swithun's church in Stavanger. Jörundr was willing to give the forty day indulgence to all those who visited or donated gifts to the church, and Árni to give twenty day indulgence. Another type of indulgence is mentioned in a *máldagi* from 1333 which says that Bishop Jón Halldórsson (of Skálholt, 1322–1339) promised a twenty day indulgence to all those who visited the church at Kirkjuból in Skútulsfjörður in search of absolution on the anniversary of the dedication, four Marian feast days and two feast

¹⁷¹ Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, p. 124.

¹⁷² On the indulgences see, e.g. Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, p. 44, Swanson, *Religion and Devotion*, p. 66.

¹⁷³ *DI* II, 65., 79. and 100.

¹⁷⁴ *DI* II, 355. and 513.

¹⁷⁵ *DI* II, 355. and 513.

¹⁷⁶ *DI* II, 100.

¹⁷⁷ *DI* II, 80. and 81.

days of John the Apostle.¹⁷⁸ Otherwise the problem of indulgence is the theme of later documents, from the beginning of the fifteenth century onwards. Obtaining the indulgence does not seem to have been directly connected to the cult of any of the Icelandic bishops in the documentary evidence concerning the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries. That, indeed, might have been another reason for the scarcity of the pilgrimage in Iceland, which also mirrors little potential response to the saintliness of the bishops among the masses.

The lack of entries about Guðmundr's shrine might mean that it did not exist in the fourteenth century. The saint's grave might have been less popular than the wells located around the country and, therefore, more accessible. Long distance miracles were becoming more and more popular in many countries in the fourteenth century, and might as well characterize Guðmundr's saintliness. Still another alternative is that the bishop's veneration did not spread as wide in the century of his translation as the narratives claim. The initiative of the influential clerical and lay groups was not shared by the rest of society and even the popularity of the wells in the fourteenth century may be disputable.

8.4.3. *The cult in annals and documentary evidence*

The sagas and the miracle book are narratives whose aim was to spread Guðmundr's cult, that is, to convince the faithful about his saintliness and to present his life as well as the posthumous evidence of the bishop's miraculous deeds. The annals as well as the documentary evidence, that is letters, statutes and church deeds (*máldagar*), on the other hand, contribute to that image from a rather different point of view. As discussed before, the Icelandic annals are a problematic source mainly because of their lack of chronological reliability as well as the complex authorial situation. In general, little research has been devoted to the years 1264–1400 as represented in this material. The common assumption is that before that time, as well as to a large extent by the beginnings of the 1300s the annals copied events recorded in the sagas, not vice versa. The sagas concerned are the *Sturlunga saga* compilation, especially *Ísls*, and the sagas of the bishops—Guðmundr Arason, Árni Þorláksson and Lárentíus Kálfsón to name the most popular

¹⁷⁸ DI II, 446.

examples.¹⁷⁹ Ólafía Einarisdóttir maintains that very little information in the annals can certainly be considered as independent of the saga material, however, over ten notes/glosses from the years 1200–1263 that relate to Guðmundr Arason cannot be traced in the *ÍsIS* (considered by the author “the most important source for Icelandic history” for around 1160–1263, that is, from Guðmundr Arason’s birth till the end of the Commonwealth, roughly).¹⁸⁰ Ólafía Einarisdóttir’s argument is that they might have been included in some version of his *vita* that has not been preserved, which indeed might be a possibility.

Nevertheless, all the “historical” events, that is, the major incidents in which he was involved are presented as facts in the annals. The exhumations, as presented above, are referred to rather scarcely, except for the translation in 1315. In fact, Jón *skalli*’s vows to Guðmundr are the only examples for his saintly reputation. No other vows to his relics or grave are referred to at all in the entries on the years 1237–1400, and especially in the second half of the fourteenth century, after the translation(s) and when the youngest saga had been written by Arngrímr. Certainly, the dubiousness of the annals as a primary source, lacunae and missing pages must be taken into consideration here, but the consistency in the entire material does not seem to be accidental. No record of any more vows or gifts is to be found in the documentary evidence either and no evidence for the dedication of any church to Guðmundr exists.

The number of vows or donations that would contribute to the saintly fame of Jón Ögmundarson is also scarce. No churches seem to have been dedicated to Jón Ögmundarson before 1400; Jón *skalli*’s vow (both the votive letter *DI* III 174. and the entry in *Annal* VII) is the only recorded and preserved vow addressed to that bishop, and even in this case he is not the only/main addressee.¹⁸¹ Jón’s fame appears to have relied on the sagas and annal entries which commemorate the crucial moments of his life as well as the translations. Of all the Icelandic holy prelates only the evidence for Þorlákr’s cult is extensive, at least as far as church dedications are concerned. A few donations to support the poor are recorded in the documentary evidence from the fourteenth century, and other type of “gifts” (see the previous

¹⁷⁹ Ólafía Einarisdóttir, *Studier i Kronologisk Metode*, pp. 319, 321–2.

¹⁸⁰ Ólafía Einarisdóttir, *Studier i Kronologisk Metode*, pp. 321–2.

¹⁸¹ Cormack, *The Saints*, p. 115.

chapter: the earliest donation is Eyjólfstaðir, 1314), a *máldagi* from Skarð (Ytraskarð) dated to 1332 mentions “Þorlákr’s cow”, but the benefactor is not named.¹⁸² *Annal VII, sub anno 1360* notes a miracle: Þorlákr saved a certain bishop (whose name is not mentioned), the crew and a chest, with church goods in a shipwreck. The same annal mentions that at the general assembly 1388 more miracles were made public. In general, all the other miracles attributed to both Jón and Þorlákr, and offerings to them as well as a couple of vows are recorded only in the saga material or the miracle stories.

Whether all the donations mentioned in *máldagar* as votive offerings should be considered gifts for some specific saints is doubtful as the intentions in which *heitfiskar* or *heithleifr* are given to the churches are not clear.¹⁸³ It would be natural to connect this type of offerings with the patrons of particular churches, but that must remain a hypothesis. In fact, very few offerings can be connected directly to specific saints or the native saints in particular (like Þorlákr’s cow at Skarð).¹⁸⁴ Similarly, the alms or charity dispensed on the feasts of certain saints show the Icelandic bishops did not constitute the majority in this particular form of veneration: Þorlákr’s name appears on the lists of the churches at Eyjólfstaðir, Spákonufell and Möðrudalur (he was not the patron saint of any of them) and Guðmundr’s at the Hólar cathedral. The Virgin Mary and the Apostles dominate in both the aspects of “gifts” as well as of the alms, and St. Óláfr is mentioned in this context as well. The information of the *máldagar* concerning church dedications is also difficult to analyze. Not all deeds list the church’s patrons and some name only one, either the main patron of the church or the first in the list of several saints.

Dating the dedications is very difficult as well, often impossible. Naming a church after a particular saint could not happen before the consecration of a church, and a small group of *máldagar* mention the date of the church’s consecration, but their value is limited by the fact that many churches appear not to have been formally dedicated until long after they were built. Another way of veneration, acquiring the image of the saint, is also rather difficult to take into consideration with complete certainty, because of the unreliability of *máldagar* as

¹⁸² *DI II*, 441.

¹⁸³ Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 57.

¹⁸⁴ Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 58.

primary sources. Still, the number of images of particular saints (both painted images and sculptures) may give us at least an idea of their popularity, especially since acquiring them did not demand episcopal approval. The commissioning of images did not depend on the status of the saint either—in the Mediterranean countries both the formally canonized saints and the uncanonized saints were depicted in numerous churches throughout the Middle Ages.¹⁸⁵ In Iceland, Þorlákr is best represented in this respect, while Jón and Guðmundr are represented very poorly.¹⁸⁶ The images of Guðmundr Arason were in possession of four churches, according to the church deeds: the church at Ásgeirsá in Víðidalur, Hof in Skagaströnd, Fagranes in Skagafjörður and Svalbarð in Svalbarðsströnd.

ÁSGEIRSA. In *Auðunarmáldagi* (DI II, 240–336., 1318) the image is not mentioned. The first document that refers to the church as the area belonging to Þingeyrar monastery is from approximately 1220.¹⁸⁷ One from 10 July 1384, mentions the purchase of the place.¹⁸⁸ If the deeds are to be trusted, it may be assumed that the image of Guðmundr arrived there some time between 1318 and 1394 or so, possibly thanks to the initiative of Þingeyrar as the image appears only in a deed written for Bishop Pétur Nikulásson.¹⁸⁹

FAGRANES. *Auðunarmáldagi* is the first deed of that church that is preserved to the present times, however, just like in the case of Ásgeirsá, Guðmundr's image is not mentioned among the church's possessions. Nor is it listed in a *máldagi* from 1360–1389 (for Bishop Jón Eiríksson), only in *Pétrsmáldagar*.

HOF. This church is named already in 1295 in a document that lists grounds given to the cloister at Staðr in Reynines by the Bishop

¹⁸⁵ Vauchez, *Sainthood in the later Middle Ages*, pp. 448–53. Vauchez mentions the important function of images as ex-voto offerings or propaganda (in the case of new, developing cults). In thirteenth century Italy and fourteenth century England and France images frequently played the same role as relics, which also might have contributed to the spread of the “long distance” miracles away from the saints' tombs. The Icelandic evidence from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is very sparse and it is difficult to state how many were commissioned e.g. as ex-voto offerings, I have not found such examples as far as any of the native saints is concerned. The church inventories only state the presence of particular images among a church's possessions. See also Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 28.

¹⁸⁶ Appendix 7.

¹⁸⁷ DI I, 101.

¹⁸⁸ DI III, 321. and 330.

¹⁸⁹ *Pétrsmáldagar*.

Jörundr Þorsteinsson (who had recently founded it).¹⁹⁰ Then it is mentioned in a letter dated to 2 April 1315, where Bishop Auðunn confirms the foundation of the cloister by Bishop Jörundr in 1295.¹⁹¹ Like in the previous two examples, *Auðunarmáldagi* does not list the image of Guðmundr. The *máldagi* from 1360–1389 seems to be the only one to mention it later.

SVALBARÐ. The *máldagi* for Bishop Pétur Nikulásson is also in this case the first one to mention the image of Guðmundr in that particular church, although the church itself is listed in *Auðunarmáldagi*. So the church must have acquired it some time between 1318 and 1394, just like the one in Ásgeirsá. According to a document from 23 August 1390, Ása Eiríksdóttir sold “Svalbard á Svalbarðsströnd” (thus, also the church) to Sæmundr Þorsteinsson; either of them might have provided the church with the image.¹⁹²

All those churches, of which only one was a *staðir*, were situated in the north of Iceland, close to both Hólar and the monasteries of Munkaþverá and Þingeyrar. All of them must have acquired Guðmundr’s image in the second half of the fourteenth century, after all the variants of his *vita* had been written. That would also correspond quite well with the date of Auðunn’s *translatio* and even Ormr’s washing of the relics. However, the images of Þorlákr and Jón also date from no earlier than the beginning of the fourteenth century, except for Jón’s first *skrift* (painting). It might either be connected to the younger versions of those saints’ *vitae* which flourished in the fourteenth century along with other types of Icelandic literary production and spread their popularity, or the problem of *máldagar* as reliable and complete primary sources, which must be mentioned again in this context. On average, those from the fourteenth century certainly are more elaborate than those from the thirteenth century, but, again, a credit should be given to numerous copyists. The fact that the documents concerning the see of Hólar are predominant had, as has already been mentioned above, complex reasons. On the other hand, the impressive amount of objects referred to as *líkneski* in the fourteenth century when compared with the evidence from the

¹⁹⁰ DI II, 159.

¹⁹¹ DI II, 220.

¹⁹² DI III, 380.

thirteenth century where only a few are listed cannot go unnoticed.¹⁹³ In addition to the fact that the Church managed to have the claims on church property settled, the amount of images might simply reveal new popular tendencies.

Two churches in the north of Iceland also owned sagas about Guðmundr: Goðdalir in Skagafjörður and Múli in Aðaldalur.¹⁹⁴ Both churches are registered in the documentary evidence as *staðir*, otherwise little is known about them. The first charter that lists the possessions of the church at Goðdalir is *Auðunarmáldagi*, but the saga is not among them. It is listed in Bishop Jón Eiríksson's charter, but not recorded in *Pétrsmáldagar*, unless the comment "Nicholas saga og aunnur skra" (the saga of St. Nicholas and other writings) could also refer to a saga concerning Guðmundr. The church at Múli had already acquired a saga about Guðmundr before 1318 as *Auðunarmáldagi* lists it. However, this is the only record. On the other hand, a charter which lists the possessions of Hólar cathedral dated to 1398 mentions "*Guðmundar sögur*", which might mean that the sagas from Goðdalir and Múli were moved to Hólar.¹⁹⁵ It is difficult to establish why those two particular churches had the sagas; the material status of the *staðir* certainly mattered as far as the acquisition of valuable items (such as manuscripts) is concerned. However, there were many *staðir* in that area, and since there is no sufficient extant evidence for e.g. connections between Goðdalir and Múli and the churches which owned Guðmundr's images, the question must remain open. *Þorláks saga* is recorded in a far greater number of churches, but slightly later than the narratives concerning Guðmundr (the first charter that mentions it is dated to 1387).¹⁹⁶ *Jóns saga* is only recorded in *Pétrsmáldagar*. An interesting fact to notice is that *Þorláks saga* is also listed in the church of Hólar's inventory book from 1398, while *Jóns saga* is only listed among the possessions of the church in Glæsibær in Eyjafjörður (a *staðr*).¹⁹⁷ If the scarcity of records is not the cause of the lack of

¹⁹³ *DI* I, 94. (autumn 1206) and 120. (1224) "líkneski yfir altari" at Reykholt; *DI* II, 32. (1270) "Nicholas líkneski" in Vallanes, 33. (ca. 1270) "Jóns líkneski baptista" and "Ólafs líkneski konungs hins helga" in Holt under Eyjafjöll; *DI* VII, 2. (copy, 1258–1440) "Blasius líkneski" in Ás in Hálsasveit.

¹⁹⁴ Appendix 7.

¹⁹⁵ The charter is dated to 2 May 1398 (*DI* III, 511.).

¹⁹⁶ *DI* III, 350.

¹⁹⁷ It is listed along with *Þorláks saga* in *Pétursmáldagar*. Also Jón's image is listed in this inventory.

evidence here, the choice of those particular churches seems to be accidental.¹⁹⁸ While images might reveal the popularity of the saints among the faithful, the sagas reflect the interest of the Church. In general, hardly anything is known about the ownership of saints' sagas in Iceland. A relationship between the dedication of a church to a particular saint and the ownership of a saga devoted to that saint must be excluded, as no church was dedicated to Guðmundr or Jón before 1400. As Margaret Cormack suggested, it is possible that the ownership was more important than the use of the texts.¹⁹⁹ The lack of written evidence concerning the churches which owned *Guðmundar sögur*, however, makes the issue difficult to solve.

The brief analysis presented above confirms that Þorlákr enjoyed the highest esteem as a holy man in Iceland throughout the central Middle Ages. As far as Jón and Guðmundr are concerned, the saga material on the latter is certainly richer, as well as the number of images. However, the presence of Jón's relics and posthumous *fama sanctitatis* is better documented in the annals and the documentary sources. He also seems to differ from his successor at Hólar in one crucial aspect—such terms as “saint”, “holy” or “blessed” do not appear in any text besides sagas in connection with the latter, only “the good” is added to his name in several cases. Otherwise, Guðmundr is only mentioned by the name/last name or as “priest”/ “bishop”.²⁰⁰ This difference between Guðmundr Arason and the other two bishops lies also in the establishment of feast days. The fact that the *translatio(s?)* or the anniversary of Guðmundr's death as a feast day are mentioned in a saga or a few annals might contribute to the hypothesis that Guðmundr's sanctity was perceived in a different way and was shaped according to different principles. However, the scarcity of those entries is rather meaningful: Guðmundr's day is mentioned in two annals, on the occasion of the death of Jón Indriðason (1339–41, of Skálholt), *sub anno* 1341.²⁰¹ It seems to me a matter of utmost importance that the official announcement of Guðmundr's feast is actually not recorded anywhere except for a brief remark in *Lárentíus saga* on the occasion of the 1315 *translatio*

¹⁹⁸ The churches described in the source material as *staðir* do not seem to have had the priority over other churches as far as the acquisition of sagas or images of the saints is concerned.

¹⁹⁹ Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 39.

²⁰⁰ See the references to Jón and Þorlákr in Appendix 4.

²⁰¹ *Gottskalks Annaler* (Annal VIII) and *Flato-annaler* (Annal IX).

(see above), and one can only assume that it actually took place. The entries in both *Annal VIII* and *IX* mention “artidar dag Guðmundar byskups”/“Guðmundar dag”, and not “Guðmundar messo” as it is usually mentioned in the case of Jón, Þorlákr or other, “imported”, saints. That might mean that the celebration of the day which honoured Guðmundr’s anniversary of death (in later centuries known as Gvendardagur) developed without any formal procedures.²⁰²

The Christian Laws Section of the law code *Grágás* contains a list of some three dozen obligatory feasts in calendrical order, accompanied by rules for their observance. The most important, designated as the “greater observance” were subject to additional rules, primarily greater restrictions on work, and Þorlákr’s feast was eventually added to that list which included those of Christ, Mary, Peter and Paul, John the Baptist, All Saints and Whitsun.²⁰³ The fact that a saint’s feast was a Holy Day of Obligation did not necessarily reflect a general interest in him or her, and the fact that one third of the feasts honour saints known as patrons of only one or no churches at all could be the proof for that.²⁰⁴ Þorlákr’s sanctity was proclaimed in 1198, and his feast (23 December) was established as one of the days of greater observance the following year; the feast of Jón of Hólar (23 April) was added in 1200. The feast of Þorlákr’s translation (20 July) was adopted as a Holy Day of Obligation in 1237.

Again the actual concept of holiness/saintliness must be addressed in this discussion. The saga authors used the terms “saint” and “holy” in reference to Guðmundr rather freely. Like the saga material, a few annal entries reveal the authors’/copyists’ respect for certain individuals other than Jón, Þorlákr and Guðmundr, expressed in the way one would rather expect in the case of a more widely acknowledged man of saintly reputation.²⁰⁵ *Annal VII*, *sub anno* 1282 mentions the death of Archbishop Jón *rauði* in Sweden with a comment “people considered him holy” (“hyggja menn hann helgan”). The same source contains an entry which mentions the death of Abbott Bjarni of Þingeyrar in 1299.

²⁰² See Appendix 6. Margaret Cormack doubts even if both Jón’s and Guðmundr’s anniversaries of death were ever adopted at the general assembly as neither of those feasts are entered in any of the mss of the Christian Law, even though most of them are from Hólar. Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 20.

²⁰³ Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 14. For more extensive information on the observance of feast days see pp. 13–24.

²⁰⁴ Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, p. 15.

²⁰⁵ Appendix 5.

Bishop Lárentíus Kálfsón reportedly said that the deceased abbot had a “holy appearance” (“synizst heilags mannz yfir bragd hafua”). Many wonderful events took place that day, light was observed shining on the monastery of Þingeyrar and the bells rang of their own accord. Similarly, the death of Abbot Guðmundr of Þingeyrar in 1339 at Munkaþverá (his body was later moved back to Þingeyrar) provoked “many wonderful events that occurred during his funeral” and people considered him holy as both *Annal* VII and IX report. The most surprising entries in this context are those concerning an individual named Þórðr Jónsson, most probably a layman. After his death in 1385 (mentioned by *Annal* VIII and IX), his bones, according to two entries in *Annal* IX, were treated like relics. In 1389 they were moved to a cemetery at Stafholt, which was arranged by the officials with the consent of all clergymen and he was considered a holy man (the same phrase “og hyggia menn hann helgan mann” is used here). An entry dated to 1390, which follows a description of a volcanic eruption, a flood and the death of eleven people, mentions one man who survived. The phrase “enn einn lifdi i husbrotunum ok hafdi heitid a Þord Jonsson” might either mean that the man survived because he had called on Þórðr, or that he made a thanksgiving vow after the disaster.

Those examples, as well as the annal entries which mention Jón and Þorlákr, reveal that the concepts of holiness and saintliness were well known in Iceland throughout the Middle Ages. The issue of a formal canonization is another problem. One might assume that annals and charters only refer to Þorlákr and Jón as “saints” because their feasts were formally adopted at the general assembly, while at the time when the entries were recorded the rules concerning papal canonization were well known and obeyed.²⁰⁶ Still, the approach towards certain chosen individuals did not always take place according to very

²⁰⁶ The issue of episcopal canonization in Iceland and the cases of Jón and Þorlákr are problematic. The adoption of Jón’s and Þorlákr’s feasts at the general assembly have been referred to as “canonization” by only a few scholars (e.g. Hans Bekker-Nielsen, ‘A note on two Icelandic saints’, in *Germanic Review* 36 (1961), 108–9; Stephan Kuttner, ‘St. Jón of Hólar: canon law and hagiography in medieval Iceland’, in *Analecta Cracoviensia* 7 (1975), 367–75). Vauchez argues, “We can therefore summarize the position with regard to control of the cult of saints in 1170 by saying that, without the ancient right having been abolished (that is, episcopal translation accepted as giving definitive approval), it was widely believed that the pope ought to be consulted and that it was for him to exercise a degree of control over canonizations” (Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 24). It may be assumed that

similar, if not the same, patterns as to Jón and Þorlákr. Besides, different aspects of the construction of a cult, such as the composition of a hagiography, a translation or the establishment of a feast day/Holy Day of Obligation, were not always synchronized. The so-called “popular” opinion and the perception of the saintliness of a particular individual is yet another issue. It is hardly possible to check how an average medieval Icelander perceived the holiness of Guðmundr Arason or any other “holy man”. Certainly, on the basis of the sagas and other sources it can be stated that there was more to his holiness than just exceptional piety, like in the case of some other individuals. Would the adoption of his feast at the general assembly make a difference? How well was the “constructed” hagiography known? Did “the society” really have a significant influence on particular variants of its composition?

No extant hagiographical sources which would praise the life and deeds of any of the men referred to in the entries quoted above are known, but the authors of those entries clearly intended to mark those particular individuals. Archbishop Jón’s fight for the rights of the Church (especially the new Christian Law he proposed and the issue of tithe) resulted in the Norwegian government’s enmity.²⁰⁷ The strife ended with the outlawry of the archbishop’s two closest followers (the bishops of Oslo and Hamar), the two bishoprics as well as the archepiscopal see were taken into custody, and the archbishop fled to Sweden where he died soon afterwards. As one of the foremost churchmen Jón certainly gained many followers and the respect for his deeds earned him the title of the holy man. “Abbot Bjarni” of Þingeyrar is most probably Bjarni Ingimundarson (1280–1299),²⁰⁸ who, among others,

Jón and (especially) Þorlákr have enjoyed the status of formally acknowledged saints among the authors and Þorlákr also among the faithful.

²⁰⁷ The arguments between the archbishop and the barons in which excommunication and outlawry were used as a means of persuasion resemble those between Guðmundr Arason and the Chieftains Kolbeinn Tumason and Sigurðr Ormsson at the time of Guðmundr’s episcopacy. One incident in particular is worth mentioning here: when in 1281 the government proclaimed the new regulation of tithe from 1277 invalid, the archbishop excommunicated Bjarni Erlingsson and Anders Pálsson *plyttr*. The barons did not respect the ban and forced the priests in Bergen to perform the services for all the excommunicants. The sources which provide information about these conflicts are the annals and *Árna saga biskups*.

²⁰⁸ The abbot’s patronymic is only mentioned in ‘Abótatal’ from c. 1360 (*DI* III, 114., see pp. 153, ft 2 and 255. p. 311).

objected to Bishop Jörundr's claim of the monastery's tithe.²⁰⁹ In a passage of *Lárentíus saga* which reports a dialogue between Bishop Árni Þorláksson and Lárentíus (dated to summer 1293), the latter concludes that two men in particular seem to him to have an aura of holiness: Bishop Árni Þorláksson and Abbot Bjarni of Þingeyrar.²¹⁰ "Abbot Guðmundr", on the other hand, is Abbot Guðmundr Arason (1310–1339),²¹¹ another opponent of Bishop Auðunn in the issue of property.²¹² According to *Lárentíus saga* Guðmundr had the support of Lárentíus; it may have also been Bjarni's case.²¹³ Both Einarr Haflíðason and the author of *Annáll IX* must have supported both abbots and Lárentíus—the generous bishop who supported Þingeyrar. References to their holiness in the sense of piety, which was greater than average might both symbolize the authorial support and the legitimization of the abbots' strife. Nevertheless, the fact that miraculous incidents were reported after their deaths bring the "holiness" of those men to a higher level, almost that of saintliness. The case of Þórðr Jónsson is in this context even more surprising as he appears to be an individual about whom no extant evidence is to be found in the Icelandic written sources. The question of his holiness must, thus, remain unanswered.

It is difficult to find a reasonable explanation for the references to the holiness of the aforementioned men in those particular annals,

²⁰⁹ *DI* II, 341.

²¹⁰ "Sagði svá Lárentíus at hann þóttiz á tveimur mönnum hafa sét heilags manns yfirbragð einkaligt: á Árna byskupi Þorlákssyni ok Bjarna ábóta á Þingeyrum" (*Lárentíus saga B*, ch. 9). There are, however, no explicit allusions to any specific events in that conversation (or passage) and the abbot is not mentioned elsewhere in the text, except an earlier note in ch. 6 where his ordination is briefly announced).

²¹¹ *DI* III, 255.

²¹² *Lárentíus saga* and a few documents provide the information concerning those events. See also *DI* II, 363. and 389.

²¹³ Despite Guðmundr's initial negative attitude towards Lárentíus (under the influence of Bishop Jörundr) at the beginning of his abbacy (*Lárentíus saga A*, ch. 28 and *B*, ch. 31), the relationship between these two men was good till Lárentíus's death. Lárentíus taught Guðmundr Latin at Þingeyrar (*Lárentíus saga A*, ch. 28 and *B*, ch. 34) and was on his side in the conflicts about property given for the support of the poor (*kristfê*), as well as about the bishop's tithe, that had, allegedly, been given to the monastery at Þingeyrar by Jón Ögmundarson (which is not confirmed by any source)—*Lárentíus saga A*, ch. 30 and *B*, ch. 38. The latter is discussed in many passages of the saga (*A*, chs. 31, 37, 39 and 43; *B*, chs. 39, 46 and 49). Þingeyrar received a generous donation from Bishop Lárentíus (*A*, ch. 43). Material support for Abbot Guðmundr was also included in Lárentíus's will (*A*, ch. 57). The issues are also referred to in *Annals IX* and VII.

especially in the case of *Annal VII*, whose author was most probably Einarr Hafliðason, supposedly involved in Guðmundr's cult, who worked in the environment that hosted the authors of the saint's *vita*. An entry in *Lögmanns annáll* (VII) saying that in 1346 Einarr Hafliðason went to see the pope in Avignon (Clement VI, pp. 1342–62) has inspired the idea that he might have gone there in order to discuss the start of Guðmundr's canonization process.²¹⁴ One would almost expect some initiative on his side to promote Guðmundr Arason's sanctity, but the holiness of other individuals is suggested instead. Einarr Hafliðason's supposed journey to Avignon is, in fact, a problematic issue: it is only mentioned in *Annal VII*, written probably by Einarr himself. The aim or the outcome of the journey are not known, but it does not seem likely that it concerned Guðmundr's canonization. That seems to be improbable, first of all because, just like in the case of Bishop Ormr's washing of the relics, there is hardly any information supporting this idea: there is no record of any documents, letters issued for that purpose or meetings held to discuss it. Second, Einarr as a well learned man familiar with the clerical circles both in Iceland and Norway, Einarr would have known the complex procedures of canonization at the time, not to mention the political situation in which the Avignon papacy found itself. It is doubtful that he would have hoped to achieve the goal at a low cost without any obstacles.

8.4.4. *The poems*

Cult can be spread in many different ways. The clerical circles eager to promote Guðmundr's holiness have also contributed to it with poetry honouring the saint. It is quite interesting that the form chosen for it was the skaldic poetry. The term *skaldic poetry* alludes to the poets' audience in the pre-Conversion period in Scandinavia. It was composed and performed at the king's court or among the chieftain's retainers. The second phase began in the twelfth and continued until the fourteenth century.²¹⁵ The question that needs to be addressed here is why verse rooted in pre-Christian tradition enjoyed such prestige in a Christianized culture in the High Middle Ages. It seems that skaldic

²¹⁴ “[...] for til paua gardz ok var j Auinione .ix. nætr”. Stefán Karlsson, personal communication.

²¹⁵ For a detailed discussion see Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*.

poetry became a part of the curriculum of the poets and its principles were perceived as the best ones. There was no conflict between pre-Christian and Christian tradition when skaldic poetry began to be used for composing religious poems. The new phase that started in the twelfth century was not the result of any turning point but of the spread of a strong textual culture and the wide-ranging learning and writing of the learned community.

In only one Icelandic bishop's life is skaldic verse part of the narrative; namely, in the four versions of the saga of Bishop Guðmundr Arason. The amount of skaldic poetry in the sagas concerning Guðmundr is impressive.²¹⁶ Guðrún Nordal has attributed this to Guðmundr's close family connections with a number of well-known poets in the north of Iceland.²¹⁷ The family circle included his uncle Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson and cousin Ögmundur Þorvarðsson. The west and north of Iceland were areas of great skaldic activity, centred especially around the family of Sturlungar, Ásbirningar in Skagafjörður, and also Hvassafell/Eyjafjörður and the Benedictine monastery at Þingeyrar. There are also poems written by men who did not know him personally, three fourteenth-century authors: Arngrímr Brandsson, the author of *GD*, Einarr Gilsson and Árni Jónsson.²¹⁸ The stanzas by Einarr Gilsson and Arngrímr Brandsson are quoted in Holm. Perg.no.5 fol. (not Einarr's *Guðmundardrápa* 1–4) and the fragment in AM 396 4to. Arngrímr's *drápa* is also referred to in the saga. Árni Jónsson's *Guðmundardrápa* is preserved only at the end of AM 398 4to.²¹⁹

Árni Jónsson, the abbot at Munkaþverá, is the least known of the three authors. His ordination in 1370 is mentioned in the Icelandic annals.²²⁰ Some journey of an unknown character and to an unknown destination is also mentioned in 1379.²²¹ There are two extant documents on a purchase of land dated to 1375 that mention his participation, otherwise nothing else is known about him.²²² *Skáldskaparmál*

²¹⁶ The number of extant vernacular poems concerning saints is, in general, rather modest (Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, pp. 41–3).

²¹⁷ Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, pp. 101–2.

²¹⁸ See also *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson 4 vols. (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1967), A II.

²¹⁹ Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, p. 108.

²²⁰ *Annals* VI, VII and IX.

²²¹ “vtan ferd” (*Annal* VII).

²²² *DI* III, 240. (25 March 1375) and 242. (19 May 1375).

mentions *bróðir Árni* but it has not been proved so far that Árni Jónsson is the individual concerned here.²²³

Einarr Gilsson's life has been documented only slightly better. He was a lawman and participated in numerous transactions as a witness, including two that involve the bishops of Hólar whose engagement in Guðmundr's cult is documented: Ormr and Jón *skalli*.²²⁴ He is also mentioned as a witness in an agreement on fishing rights where one of the sides is Abbot Gunnsteinn of Þingeyrar.²²⁵ It is thus quite clear that his close relationship with the church dignitaries at Hólar and with the Benedictines resulted in the compositions praising Guðmundr's sanctity.

Arngrím Brandsson, to whom *GD* is attributed, is the author we know most about. He composed a *hrynhent* poem (sixty-six stanzas) and three verses in *dróttkvætt* to honour Guðmundr.²²⁶ The abbot's name occurs frequently in the annals and, although his family background is unknown, Arngrím's ecclesiastical career is quite well documented, and reveals quite a dynamic personality. He stayed in the southern diocese before he became the abbot of Þingeyrar.²²⁷ *Annals* V and VIII mention that in 1334 Arngrím was "gefinn Odda stadr" (which probably means that he administered it), and only in *Annal* VIII is it noted that in 1341 he entered a monastery ("geck j klaustur"), most probably Þingeyrar, where he was ordained abbot in 1351.²²⁸ *Annal* VII contains an interesting piece of information dated to 1357, according to which the priests in Hólar bishopric refused to obey Arngrím as a result of his wrongdoings ("prestar j Hóla byskop-sdæme afsogdu lydne vidr Arngrim abota. þuiat hann var borin liotum maalum"), and *Annal* IX adds that the abbot had to resign the posi-

²²³ Guðrún Nordal, 'Tools of Literacy', pp. 79–80.

²²⁴ His name is mentioned on the lists of witnesses in *DI* II, 466. and 470., *DI* III, 33., 96. and 197. *DI* III, 33. (27 April 1353) lists Bishop Ormr and *DI* III, 96. (15 May 1359) Bishop Jón *skalli*.

²²⁵ *DI* III, 197. (14 June 1364).

²²⁶ The authorship and details of the *Kvæði* have been discussed e.g. by Arvid Isberg in his introduction to *Kvæði Guðmundar byskups: efter Skinnboken N:o 5 Fol.å Kongl. Biblioteket i Stockholm: akademisk afhandling* (Lund: Fr. Berlings Boktryckeri och Stilgjuteri, 1877), pp. 1–25.

²²⁷ The entry "Jon byskup sendi sira Arngrim sinna vegna" (*sub anno* 1327 in *Annal* IX and 1329 in *Annal* VII) refer to Jón Halldórsson, the bishop of Skálholt (1322–1339).

²²⁸ *Annal* VIII specifically mentions: *Vtkvoma Orms byskups j Hualfirdi. var hann at Þingeyrum at Laurencius messo og vigdi þar brodr Arngrim til abota*".

tion of *officialis* and abbot.²²⁹ After it had been confirmed that Bishop Jón *skalli* was appointed the bishop of Hólar, *visitatores* who went around the country on behalf of the Church (the Norwegian archbishop) restored Arngrímr to his position.²³⁰ Whatever the conflict was and however big Arngrímr's trespasses were, he clearly enjoyed the archbishop's support. He was involved in quite a number of transactions such as the purchase of land, and the participants were usually the bishops of Hólar, also Ormr and Jón *skalli*, as in Einarr's case, and the Benedictines of Þingeyrar.²³¹ He died *in festo reliquiarum* 1361 or 1362.²³² With such connections in the north of Iceland it is not surprising that Arngrímr became the author of a saga about Guðmundr Arason despite his busy life. Perhaps the most influential of all the three poets, the abbot certainly used his opportunity to have an impact on the development of the cult. What is known about the other two authors reveals the aforementioned strong connection and cooperation between the see of Hólar and the monasteries of Munkaþverá and Þingeyrar. The composition of poetry in honour of Guðmundr Arason was another way of spreading the popularity of the cult which, in turn, might strengthen the position of Hólar as a powerful religious centre.

Einarr Gilsson is the author of a *dróttkvætt* poem of forty stanzas, a *hrynhent* poem of seventeen stanzas, and *Selkolluvísur*, a *dróttkvætt* poem of twenty-one stanzas. His *drápa* is entirely preserved in *GD*. It is distributed rather unevenly among the chapters. Two regularities can be noticed: the stanzas refer to the events described in the text, and it is Guðmundr's saintliness, not Icelandic politics, that is discussed by the author. A few short episodes from his life are mentioned: his birth, the premonition, Ari's death in Norway and Guðmundr's education as

²²⁹ "(var Arngrímr ok afsettr officiölatu ok abböta dæmi ok sagdiz iattaz hafa vndir predicara lifnat. tok Þorsteinn Hallzson officiölatum)".

²³⁰ *Annals* VII and IX, 1358: "skipödu [...] Arngrím aftr i aböta stett at Þyngeyrum".

²³¹ *DI* II, 518 (involved in a purchase of land). *DI* III, 19 (as *officialis*—1351, visitation/inspection ad. landmarks), 31 (1353, as a "brother", a reference to a previous purchase of land), 33. (27 April 1353, Ormr mentions ordaining Arngrímr an abbot in his report on the inspection of landmarks), 36. (Arngrímr is a witness, the bishops purchase more land), 97. (Jón *skalli*'s confirmation of *DI* III, 31.), 98. (Arngrímr involved in a transaction. Bishop Jón gives all the salmon fishing rights in Hjaltabakki to the monastery at Þingeyrar), 151. (a prebend, purchase of more land for the monastery).

²³² *Annal* VIII, *sub anno* 1361 and *Annal* VI, *sub anno* 1362.

well as the first ordination. Otherwise, the pious habits which the saint already developed during the priestly career, taking care of the needy and various miracles, both *in vita* and posthumous, are described by Einarr. It is difficult to notice any preferences as far as the typology of the miracles is concerned. The second part (twenty-three stanzas) is devoted to a few episodes, and each of them is described in more than one stanza: the case of Kolbeinn's wife, the incident with the silver bowl (divided in three parts), the turf which a poor woman cooked and which Guðmundr turned into meat, and two "*vatnormr* cases" from the West Fjords. The last stanza is devoted to the miraculous rescue of an unbaptised baby. Two other poems by Einarr Gilsson that are included in *GD* in entirety are the *Selkollu-vísur* in chapter 43. that is devoted to the bishop's dealings with the spirit, and the *hrynhent* poem in ch. 50, describing Guðmundr's discussion with Archbishop Þórir.

Arngrímr Brandsson's *Kvæði Guðmundar Byskups* is also merely a praise of the holy bishop and a tale about some of the events listed in *vita*. An interesting thing to observe is that none of the stanzas included in *GD* refers to politics, although *Kvæði* does contain lengthy descriptions of the conflicts. The stanzas used in the *vita* focus on religious matters and contain a lot of authorial allusions to having Guðmundr canonized some time in the near future. The comparison of Guðmundr to the cedar of Lebanon is quite outstanding, but far from unique in Icelandic religious literature it has been copied from Bergr Sokkason's *Nikulaus saga* II.²³³ This Biblical metaphor was used by Arngrímr also in the prose text and elaborated in order to list Guðmundr's prime virtues.

The poems by those three skálds have a lot in common. Árni Jónsson's *drápa* does not differ much from those by Einarr and Arngrímr either. It does not contain any new material and is focused on the bishop's sanctity. None of his verses has been incorporated into any variant of Guðmundr's *vita*, and it is hard to see a pattern in the choice of events he decided to describe. Thus, the input of the poetry is rather limited. It repeats what is already known from the sagas, unlike, for instance, poems about Bishop Páll Jónsson, the nephew of Þorlákr Þorhallsson. They are not a part of *Páls saga* or refer to any events from the nar-

²³³ Hallberg, 'Sammanfattning om Bergr Sokkasons insats', pp. 152–60.

rative, but describe the bishop's character and praise his family.²³⁴ The narratives concerning Guðmundr are numerous and elaborate; could that be the reason why the poems concentrate on certain events known from the narratives and contribute nothing new? They might have served the popularization of Guðmundr's cult by the analysis of motifs that were already known to quite a few from the texts, and that needed to be spread in a shorter, rhymed form among larger circles.

²³⁴ Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, p. 99.

CONCLUSION

The complexity and lack of regular patterns make medieval saintliness a difficult phenomenon to explore. This study has examined and discussed the construction of Guðmundr's cult in the Icelandic written sources. Genre, potential time of composition, provenance and the socio-political circumstances have been taken into consideration. A lot of questions must remain unanswered, but some general statements about the process and possible causes of the initiative to spread Guðmundr's saintly fame can be made.

A comparison of the narrative and the documentary sources has indicated that Guðmundr Arason's veneration might not have been as widespread and intense as the sagas and modern research claim. The popularity of the holy wells in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as claimed by the sagas is difficult to prove. There are no statutes or law codes that would give any directions as to the way they should be approached by the faithful. Nor is there any documentary evidence which specifically states that the use of water related to the cult of the saint or proclaiming it holy was inappropriate or forbidden.

That does not mean that such a form of veneration did not exist at all, only that it was not as extensive before or during the first decades after the translation. In my view, it might have intensified due to the spread of the contents of the sagas. On the one hand, such a situation is rather natural, as many European saints had to "stand the test of time" before their saintly reputation was widely acknowledged. The consecrations might indeed have been introduced by Guðmundr during his priesthood and a number of people might have believed in the miraculous power of the water. Still, those who were responsible for recording the miracles were the clergy, and it is their interpretation that has been preserved in the sources. Thus, they were, in fact, the representatives of "the people" who had the opportunity to influence the development of the cult.

The earliest written source included in this study which reports Guðmundr's consecrations and the miraculous properties of the holy water is the earliest extant narrative about him, *GP*, written in the 1240s. The number, form and interpretation of the miracle stories involving the act of consecrations or the consecrated water changed with the

passage of time and genre. The fourteenth-century sources contain a far bigger collection of this type of miracles as well as Guðmundr's lecture about the properties of water, which were rich in Biblical allusions. Since the use of that relic was a novelty which distinguished Guðmundr from other Icelandic priests and bishops, and especially the holy prelates Jón and Þorlákr, the authors willing to proclaim him a saint certainly found that fact useful.

Another issue which might be connected with that particular aspect of Guðmundr's saintly reputation is the fact that Hólar, or the saint's grave, does not seem to have been very popular as a pilgrimage site. The presence of holy wells might have changed the focus of the faithful. An impressive number of stories, especially from the corpus dated to (approximately) the time of Guðmundr's episcopacy, indicate that the water was virtually an obligatory item in every house and was used as a remedy for healing both people and animals whenever the bishop could not be met in person. The situation has been depicted as a necessity: travelling around the country in search of Guðmundr would hardly seem a reasonable decision, especially since the saint spent much of his time on visitations and the conflicts with some laymen forced him to seek shelter wherever and whenever he could find it.

The posthumous corpus provides a new type of miracle. The cases do not differ much from those *in vita*, but the means vary quite a lot. In those miracle stories the holy water does not play as significant a role as it does in the pre-mortem stories. There is no pattern as far as the case type is concerned, and it would be wrong to assume that the favourite remedy was used to cure less complex diseases, injuries, etc. However, the frequency with which the consecrated water was used in those cases is far lower than in the pre-mortem miracle stories. In the posthumous stories the crucial means to achieve Guðmundr's miraculous help were vows. The church at Hólar is only mentioned as the recipient of the "payment" a few times, and it is impossible to state in each case to what other places the offerings were brought. Presumably, the churches in the vicinity of which the miracles reportedly occurred benefited from them. Furthermore, Guðmundr's grave or the cathedral hardly ever appears as the destination of the "pilgrimages" undertaken in order to give thanks for a miracle. All cases but one comes from the youngest source, which, again, might point to Guðmundr's "passing the test of time". Yet, it is most probably a careful addition made by the hagiographer who wished to adjust the saga to the international

standards, with the hope that the document would contribute to the canonization of the bishop.

Although the first possibility cannot be excluded, I find the second one more convincing. All the fourteenth-century sources elaborate certain aspects of Guðmundr's life and saintliness underlined in *GP* and *Ís/S*, and Arngrímr's variant is the most innovative one. *GD* is a variant whose portrayal of Guðmundr's saintliness differs from those included in other sagas even in the chapters devoted to the holy man's childhood and adolescence. Despite the fact that none of the sagas depicts the saint's early years as particularly difficult or rebellious, *GP*, *GA* and *GB* show Guðmundr as a child and teenager whose interests and behaviour resembled those of any average boy. *GD*, on the other hand, presents an ideal image of a saint whose destiny is obvious from the first decade of his life and who is aware of that. Unlike in the earlier variants, the earliest years are not depicted by Arngrímr as a preparatory stage of life, influenced by the powerful members of Guðmundr's family. However, all the variants agree upon the absence of dramatic incidents such as epiphanies, visions or even conversion, which was frequently the case of many adolescent saints in the hagiographical European tradition. A few signs, dreams or premonitions that supposedly occurred (usually to people around him, not to Guðmundr himself) might be representative of any saga concerning laymen.

Guðmundr's priesthood and episcopacy have been portrayed in all the variants as interesting periods, rich in historical and miraculous events. The three main aspects on which the authors have focused are the miracles, the connections with the deceased saints, especially the Virgin Mary, and Guðmundr's relations with powerful laymen. The first miracles worked by Guðmundr during the years 1185–1203 took place without his awareness. That awareness grew with the passage of time as he began to use various rituals and relics, in particular consecrated water. Different types of cases have been recorded: healing injuries, diseases or the results of accidents, the taming of the elements, etc. The beneficiaries were both humans and animals. The typology changed a lot with Guðmundr's consecration: hardly any healings have been attributed to the years of his episcopacy; the predominant type became the "provision of food" or the "rescue miracle". In general, about half of Guðmundr's miracles are *in vita*, which distinguishes him significantly from Jón and Þorlákr. It must also be underlined that the fourteenth-century variants contain a bigger number of miracles than *GP* does, and that the stories are more complex and elaborate.

The years of Guðmundr's priesthood were the proper formative years for the saint according to the majority of the narratives. While Guðmundr's inner transformation, as the author of *GP* suggests, was probably caused by the death of his best friend, the development of his miraculous abilities occurred in connection with the translation of Jón's and Þorlákr's bones. The fourteenth century authors have also included the vision, which the woman named Rannveig* experienced. The vision reveals that Guðmundr's saintly reputation among the deceased saints in heaven was already well known. *GD* underlines Guðmundr's spiritual connection with famous holy prelates in numerous passages. By omitting the role of Guðmundr's best friend Þorgeirr and uncle Ingimundr, the author indicates that no major change or influence was necessary in his life. All the events that resemble incidents from the lives of such renowned holy bishops as Ambrose or Martin only confirm his saintliness and the fact that he belonged in that circle.

Guðmundr's relationship with chieftains is extensively described in the chapters that concern his priesthood and episcopacy. It would be wrong to claim that all the chieftains were against him. The portrayal of Kolbeinn Tumason as "Henricus novus" and a fierce arch-enemy was largely shaped by Arngrímr, though without much consistency. Arngrímr decided to underline the stubbornness and pride of Kolbeinn and Sigurðr Ormsson at the cost of the miracles which Guðmundr had worked for them during his priesthood, during which time, as other variants report, they were friends. The comparison of all the sagas reveals that, in general, Guðmundr had many powerful supporters who followed him. Besides, Sigurðr and Kolbeinn were also depicted as religious men and the latter's devotion to the Virgin Mary is indisputable and significant in this context. Arngrímr's portrayal of the death scene shows Guðmundr's symbolic victory over the chieftain, but also the salvation of Kolbeinn's soul, which was possible largely due to the chieftain's own piety.

Another "controversial" aspect of Guðmundr's episcopacy often discussed by modern research is that of Guðmundr's abuse of hospitality and his kindness towards vagrants and beggars. A comparison of the saga material shows that the motif of a large and very mixed group that constantly followed the saint was elaborated by the fourteenth-century sources. Numerous miracle stories were rooted in the tales of several bad seasons in Iceland, whose occurrence is confirmed by scientific data. The presence of beggars and vagrants as well as their wish

to follow Guðmundr cannot be entirely excluded. The system of help for the needy and the activities of the communes did not necessarily prevent this society from experiencing poverty. The existence of laws concerning the problem might also indicate that. However, the overall image of the situation seems to be as follows: Guðmundr's mercy and his wish to exercise charity did not allow the bishop to reject those who decided to follow him. Nevertheless, except for two occasions, beggars and vagrants are not specifically mentioned in the texts and Guðmundr's anger with those who plundered the estates clearly shows his attitude towards such behaviour. The miracle stories support that theory. The poor people who receive his help are those who suffer poverty despite their hard work. Beggars are only mentioned in one example, involving the miraculous division of a silver dish.

Nothing in other types of written evidence from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries suggests that charity constituted an important part of Guðmundr's cult. In my view, the bishop's aid to the needy was not continued by the faithful for a few potential reasons: Þorlákr was already a well established native saint honoured by donations to the needy. Difficult living conditions which added to the lengthy struggle about possessions between laymen and the clergy were not likely to encourage such activity. I would suggest that by creating the image of the saint as the supporter of the poor, the authors hoped to introduce Guðmundr as a patron saint of various social groups, not only among the poorest. Since three Norwegian bishops at Hólar were accused of dishonest pursuits and visiting the parishioners with an excessive following who exhausted their provisions, the powerful inhabitants of the northern quarter might have supported the idea. According to one of the fourteenth-century stories, Guðmundr was chastised by a rich farmer who highlighted the violence of a hungry mob to the bishop. This aspect may be interpreted in two ways. First, that the authors, related to the monastic circles of Munkaþverá and Þingeyrar, wished to reprimand the bishops (with whom they also had arguments about privileges and possessions) and present Guðmundr as a contrasting example. Second, that Auðunn, Ormr and Jón, hoping to reconcile with the monks and the rest of society, affected Guðmundr's cult by focusing on his relics, but also by influencing the image of the saint in the sagas, perhaps hoping that his example would explain or excuse their behaviour. Several domestic miracles attributed to Guðmundr occurred thanks to the evangelical principle of sharing. Those who offered their hospitality to Guðmundr received twice as much (or

more) in return, as he was not only the representative of the Church but also of God, and miraculous multiplication of food was often the proof of it.

Of all the vows examined in the study, the ones that promised the richest offerings were those which commemorated Þorlákr. Vows to Guðmundr are much more modest in quality and number. Those recorded in the posthumous miracle stories are the only ones. No other vow except for those made by Bishop Jón Eiríksson *skalli* exists in the extant material before the one made at Munkaþverá in 1403 in the hope of protection against the plague. Even in those two rare cases the suppliants do not turn to Guðmundr exclusively. He is addressed along with the Virgin Mary and other saints, although making a shrine for him and the appeal to start the canonization process is listed among other offerings.

As far as other forms of veneration are concerned, there is no evidence that any church has ever been dedicated to Guðmundr and his image has only been listed in the inventory books of four churches in northern Iceland. Images, as modern research has shown, might be considered evidence of spontaneous, popular veneration. The commissioning of the images and donation of them to churches did not demand episcopal approval. The presence of Guðmundr's images in those four particular churches does not seem to be accidental. Ásgeirsá, Fagranes, Hof and Svalbarð are all located close to the cathedral and the monastery of Þingeyrar. Ásgeirsá is even mentioned in a document from 1220 as a farm belonging to the Þingeyrar monastery. In all the cases the influence of the *translatio* or any earlier veneration is problematic. The images must have been acquired around 1350 or later as they are listed only in the charters from the second half of the fourteenth century. On the other hand, it must be borne in mind that it is unknown what kind of images these were. Perhaps the process of commissioning and making them was, indeed, inspired by the translation but took a few years, and therefore the objects have not been included in the earlier charters. Another problem worth mentioning here is the increasing number of images listed in the fourteenth-century charters, also those of Jón and Þorlákr. Thus, the fact that the images of the most recently deceased saint were not acquired earlier by any church, might be a part of a more general trend or the thoroughness of the fourteenth-century bishops. The appearance of Guðmundr's images on the lists of church inventories in the same decades when the different variants of the *vita* were completed can hardly be accidental.

Þorlákr's position as the most highly estimated saint in medieval Iceland seems to be indisputable on the basis of the source material. His cult is quite well documented. The bishop was the patron and co-patron of numerous churches, his feast day was observed from the early thirteenth century, shortly after his death, and a number of his images are listed in the church inventories. Of all the churches that commemorated Þorlákr by the acquisition of an image or a dedication, quite a large number were *staðir*, a few also in the north of Iceland. As far as Jón is concerned, the number of the sagas devoted to him as well as of his images is far less impressive. It has, therefore, been assumed that his cult was hardly widespread, and certainly not as much as Guðmundr's.

It seems, then, rather surprising that of all the three holy bishops, Guðmundr is the only one not introduced as *sanctus* or even *helgi* in any other written source than the narratives concerning him. The adjective *helgi* might be read as synonymous with *sanctus* in, e.g., the annal entries, when it is put in front of a personal name. However, *helgi* appears also in various texts in such sentences as "he was a holy man". A number of individuals, including laymen, have been referred to this way in various types of sources and the saga material (both as far as the *Sturlunga saga* compilation and the *biskupa sögur* are concerned). The context indicates that the word should be understood as "very pious" or "virtuous" in quite a broad sense as it has been applied to many characters, not only the bishops who were officially venerated.

Sanctus, on the other hand, signifies those who were perceived as saints. In annal entries, vows or inventory books it is placed in front of the personal names, e.g. "Sanctus Thorlacus"/"Sanctus Johannes Holensis". In all those sources Guðmundr is only introduced by name or title ("priest" or "bishop"); eventually the nickname *góði* is added. The reasons, as in many other aspects discussed here, may be numerous. First, although both the saga material and the annals mention Auðunn's translation of Guðmundr's bones, none of these points to the fact that the saint's feast was established by some formal process. Furthermore, as far as the saga material is concerned, it must not be forgotten that the only note on the establishment of Guðmundr's feast is to be found in *Lárentíus saga*, not in any of the *Guðmundar sögur*. The formal adoption of both Jón's and Guðmundr's feast at the general assembly has been questioned by modern research as none of these feasts are entered in any of the manuscripts of the Christian Law,

although most of these are from Hólar. I would suggest that one of the reasons for the absence of Jón's and Guðmundr's feast in the manuscripts of the Christian Law might be the relatively small popularity of both bishops at the time when the manuscripts were written down. According to the annals and the saga material Jón's feast was adopted by law and the references to him as "sanctus" would confirm that. In Guðmundr's case such evidence does not exist.

Second, this assumption seems to be supported by the way in which the anniversary of the death of the three Icelandic holy bishops is referred to. While the obituary of Jón or Þorlákr is mentioned as *messu*, that of Guðmundr is *ártíðardagr*, *jafnlengdardagr* or *Guðmundardagr*. The frequency with which the fourteenth-century evidence mentions Guðmundr's feast is another issue. Like Jón's, but very much unlike Þorlákr's, it is only mentioned in a casual context a few times late in the fourteenth century. No special donations to the poor, fasts or any other forms of religious practice seem to have been connected with that date.

This comparison of the sources has raised the question as to whether the number of the sagas concerning Guðmundr Arason might be considered the outcome of a spontaneous mass veneration of the bishop as a saint. Although the source material is complex and the reliability of the extant sources may be questionable, a few general statements can be made. The input of the northern clerical circles seems to be obvious and in my view the clergy from Þingeyrar and Munkaþverá were responsible for the orchestration of the cult. It is difficult to establish whether one can speak about rivalry between the monasteries of Munkaþverá and Þingeyrar or a co-operation between the two houses in this case. At least two authors of the sagas concerning Guðmundr, namely Bergr and Arngrímr as well as Árni Lárentíusson, spent long periods of time in both monasteries. Þingeyrar is believed to have been the most advanced and productive monastery, but Guðmundr's family history had also established a connection with Munkaþverá. Two chieftains, his grandfather Þorgeirr Hallsson and paternal uncle Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson retired there, and another paternal uncle, Þórðr, was a monk in the monastery. The presence of the saint's family members at Munkaþverá as well as their donations might have influenced the idea of popularizing Guðmundr's saintliness by the production of hagiographical material. As an individual, Guðmundr must have been quite a charismatic person who might have indeed introduced certain innovations into the Icelandic religiosity. His arguments with some

powerful laymen and his travels around the country can be considered historical facts. All those events inspired his contemporaries who decided to commemorate him as a saint. Still, it is not certain that Guðmundr would have attracted as much attention as he did long after his death, had it not been for the fourteenth-century narratives. It was the number of narratives and poems about Guðmundr that influenced the idea of his extreme popularity among medieval Icelanders, which was frequently referred to in modern scholarship.

All those variants postdate the *translatio* in 1315. As demonstrated above, there is enough evidence to suggest that the Norwegian Bishop Auðunn Þorbergsson probably initiated the translation in order to influence the socio-political circumstances. His intention might have been to improve the relations with the monks and abbots as well as to increase the income of Hólar. His successors at the see, Ormr Ásláksson and Jón Eiríksson, might have followed his idea while facing a similar situation: the opposition of the powerful clergy and the laymen of the north. From the modern perspective, it may be stated that the work of the authors was far more successful than that of the bishops. While the material forms of the cult do not seem to have evolved much, since there is no evidence of any church dedication, very few images, and little focus on Hólar as the centre of the veneration, the narratives seem to have influenced the common idea of Guðmundr's saintliness. The authors of the poems about Guðmundr, composed in the second half of the fourteenth century, have also contributed to the prelate's *fama sanctitatis*. Their connections with the monasteries of Munkaþverá and Þingeyrar as well as close contacts with the bishops Ormr and Jón are documented. Hence, I find the hypothesis about the influence of the monastic groups on the construction of Guðmundr's cult rather convincing.

The overall image of the saint is fairly complex. Certain patterns can be observed as far as the typology of the miracles is concerned. There is a clear difference between the depiction of Guðmundr in different types of sources, but also in various sagas, depending on the genre and on the time of composition. All the narratives agree about his being an approachable, caring, though certainly not submissive man, capable of bringing vengeance on those who needed a reprimand. The devotion to the Virgin Mary, the use of relics, and especially the power of water consecrated by him distinguishes him from Jón and Þorlákr as much as the acknowledgement of his *in vita* saintliness. None of his counterparts had that many female adversaries and companions. Arngrímr's

variant has focused on the universality of it, on Guðmundr's similarity to the famous holy bishops and an individual path to perfection. The most characteristic features of the Icelandic saga writing, such as the presentation of the family ties or the interplay of different family members, have been abandoned for the sake of references to theological writings or Biblical quotes. It is noticeable that all the authors were familiar with Christian literature and models of saintliness which circulated in Europe. This knowledge, added to their writing skills, helped the authors create a convincing portrait of a holy man whose deeds would also appeal to a public unfamiliar with the Icelandic conditions. Terms referring to saintliness as well as the principles of hagiography are, within certain boundaries, quite flexible. The discussion of Guðmundr Arason's cult shows that earning the status of a saint could depend on numerous factors. The 'truth' about saintliness is indeed revealed through the depiction of specific action in the life of the saint.¹ Those actions—good deeds, miracles, fulfilled premonitions, or other signs of divine power acting through the individual may be pre- or postmortem, but must be frequent and witnessed by many. Gregory of Tours' statement could also be understood in a more metaphorical way: the truth about saintliness is revealed through the depiction of various examples of specific actions in a composed and recorded life of a saint. The specific actions, if placed in a certain space and time, and supported by facts familiar to a large group of people, may prove very convincing. Such life, *vita*, with a number of *miracula*, whether resulting from oral tradition circulating in a society or composed in order to start a new religious tradition in that society, can become an influential tool of power.

¹ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 5.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Offerings listed in miracle stories (*GJtb*, *GB* and *GD*)

The descriptions of vows recorded in Guðmundr's miracle book, *GB* and *GD* are not always precise. The identity of suppliants and beneficiaries is not always mentioned and the geographical distribution of the miracles is also rather problematic, since the location is not always explicitly stated (if it is stated at all). This list provides, however, a very general image of what was offered by suppliants to thank or ask Guðmundr for intercession. In cases when an offering is mentioned but the destination unknown, the suppliant most probably intended to give it either to the church of Hólar or to the nearest church.

GJtb, ch. 29; *GB*, ch. 143 (aid in difficult childbirth): ten marks of fish would be given to the poor by Óláfr, the husband (*bóndi hennar*) of the suffering woman, in Eyri in Hvalvatnsfjörður.

GJtb, ch. 30; *GB*, ch. 144a (provision of extra strength for an exhausted cow):

- 1) milk from the fifth milking after the cow had calved was promised to the poor by a "priest Hrafn" at Leyrdalsheiði (failed attempt, no improvement took place after this vow had been made).
- 2) Guðmundr [that is, the church at Hólar] should receive ("eiga og hafa") half of the calf which the cow was going to have (and which Hrafn would feed if it survived). If it is a heifer, half of it would be given in lease to the poor when it reaches maturity. In case Hrafn decides to kill the cow, the poor would receive half of it.

GJtb, ch. 32; *GB*, ch. 144d (finding a lost lamb): Sigurður Vigfússon (place unknown) vowed to distribute as many alms among the poor on the anniversary of Guðmundr's death as he would find appropriate.

GJtb, ch. 32; *GB*, ch. 144e (healing pain in the eyes): Snorri Magnússon (place unknown) vowed to distribute alms among the poor.

Gjtb, ch. 33; *GB*, ch. 144g (healing a swollen leg): Þorsteinn from Hlýskógr promised to provide poor people with a meal and feed a cow [owned by the church] on the anniversary of his [Guðmundr's] death.

Gjtb, ch. 36; *GB*, ch. 145c (provision of a safe passage in a storm): men sailing west of Hólargnúpr at Hornstrandir vowed to visit Hólar and donate an unspecified amount of money to the church.

Gjtb, ch. 37; *GB*, ch. 145d (aid in difficult childbirth): Þorgerðr (place unknown) vowed to give a meal [to the poor] and an *eyrir* of wax [if the baby lives till he/she is baptised] (the birth was successful and the woman allegedly gave alms to some Guðmundr's relatives).

Gjtb, ch. 38; *GB*, ch. 145e (healing frostbitten feet): Ívarr Benteinsson from Bóndastadur in Fljótsdalhérað vowed to give a mark of wax to his [Guðmundr's] burial place [Hólar].

Gjtb, ch. 38; *GB*, ch. 145f (healing pain in feet): Ívarr Benteinsson from Bóndastadur in Fljótsdalhérað vowed two *aurar* of wax and a visit to Hólar.

Gjtb, ch. 38; *GB*, ch. 145g (healing a sick cow): Ívarr Benteinsson from Bóndastadur in Fljótsdalhérað vowed to give meals to the poor.

GD, ch. 80 (difficult pregnancy): Þórný (place unknown) vowed to offer an *eyrir* of wax

GD, ch. 83 (*vatnormr*): an anonymous woman from the West Fjords vowed a pilgrimage to Hólar and an *eyrir* of home-spun cloth [to the church].

GD, ch. 83 (*vatnormr*): an anonymous woman from the West Fjords promised to go to Hólar and distribute alms which she considered appropriate.

Viðbætir: (healing a horse) an anonymous priest (in the south of Iceland) vowed to give to the poor food worth an *eyrir* on the anniversary of Guðmundr's death.

Appendix 2

Miracle stories that mention provision of food:

Gjtb, ch. 3; *GB*, ch. 117; *GD*, chs. 65–6 (Borgarfjörður): Guðmundr saved Böðvarr Þórðarson's sheep by excommunicating a fox which threatened the flock.

GJtb, ch. 7; *GB*, ch. 121; *GD*, ch. 64 (vicinity of Hólar): a cow was given to the wife of Sigmundur *snagi*.¹

GJtb, ch. 9; *GB*, ch. 123; *GD*, ch. 68 (Reykjahlíð at Mývatn): miraculous fishing was provided for farmer Þorsteinn Þórðarson.

GJtb, ch. 10; *GB*, ch. 124; *GD*, ch. 67 (Húk): miraculous fishing was provided for farmer Ali.

GJtb, ch. 12; *GB*, ch. 128; *GD*, ch. 65 (Strandir): a poor woman cooked some grass in water consecrated by Guðmundr and survived on it for a whole summer.

GJtb, ch. 13; *GB*, ch. 129; *GD*, ch. 65 (vicinity of Hólar): Guðmundr's blessing turned a lump of turf into meat.

GJtb, chs. 17–8; *GB*, ch. 134; *GD*, ch. 65 (Jörva in Haukadalur): Guðmundr blessed a tub of sour whey (*sýruker*) and a measure of butter (*smjörspann*; *GD*: *ker með búnyt*) which belonged to Þórey Grímsdóttir, and none of the items was found by the intruders who intended to take them.

GJtb, ch. 26; *GB*, ch. 140; *GD*, ch. 65 (Aðalvík): multiplication of food for Ingibjörg, the sister of Helgi Lambkársson and Guðmundr's friend.

GJtb, ch. 27; *GB*, ch. 141; *GD* 68 (place unknown): exceptional provision of hay for Oddkatla, Guðmundr's friend.

GD, ch. 65: a whale for “a farmer, friend of Guðmundr, who lived near the sea” (it is most probably the priest Jón Brandsson from Steingrímsfjörður mentioned in *GP*. In the autumn of 1200 Guðmundr was supposed to come to Steingrímsfjörður with a large following he had managed to gather by that time. On the way to Steingrímsfjörður someone suggested sending a message to Jón Brandsson so that he would be prepared to welcome a big gathering. Guðmundr did not see the need of doing so “for God will provide for us and send them a whale before we depart from Jón's house”. The prophecy was fulfilled).²

GD, ch. 65: a whale for “a female friend who lived near the sea”.

¹ From Eyðihús, d. 2 January 1225 (name index/*Sts* II, p. 434).

² *GP*, ch. 19; *GA*, ch. 83; *GB*, ch. 57.

Appendix 3

Translatio of Guðmundr's bones performed by Bishop Auðunn Þorbergsson as recorded in the Icelandic annals.

Annal IV, "Vpp tekin bein Gvðmundar Byskups fyrir aheit ok iarðteina gorð."

Annal V, "Vpp tekin bein hins goða Guðmundar byskups Ara sonar ok iartegna giorð fyrir aheit. ok arnaðar orð sancte Maríe drottningar ok verðleika byskupsins."

Annal VII, "hann let vpp taka bein Gudmundar byskops .vj°. kalendas Nouembris."

Annal VIII, "Vpp tekin bein goda Gudmundar byskups og buit vm uirduliga saker aaheita og jarteigna."

Annal IX, "Audun byskup let taka vpp bein Gudmundar byskups .vi. kl. nouembris" (in this entry the *translatio* is dated to 1314).

Appendix 4

The cult of the vernacular saints as recorded in the Icelandic annals.

Below are listed entries which introduce both Jón Ögmundarson and Þorlákr Þorhallsson as saints. As far as Guðmundr Arason is concerned, such entries in which words *sanctus* or *heilagr* are added to the name of the bishop are not recorded in any of the Icelandic annals, even in reference to the *translatio* of his relics (as demonstrated above).

Annal I

1198, Tekin vp heilagr domr Þorlacs byscops.

Annal II

1292, hinn helgi THorlacr biskup skrinlagiðr.

Annal III

1198, Tekinn upp heilagr domr Þorlaks byskups.

1292, Þorlacr biskup hinn helgi skrinlagðr.

Annal IV

1106, Var vigðr Jon byskvp hinn helgi til Hóla á Islanndi fyrstr af Otvri erchibyskvpí i Lvndi at tilskipan Paschalis pape eptir kos-

ningi Gitzvrrar byskups af Skálaholli *ok* allra lanndzmannanna samþykki á Íslanndi.

- 1121, *Transitus sancti Johannis* episcopes.
- 1133, Fó'ddr Thorlácr hinn helgi
- 1174, Kosinn Thorlácr hinn helgi til byskups.
- 1193, *Transitus sancti Thorlaci episcopi*.
- 1198, *Translatio sancti Thorlaci* episcopes.
- 1200, *Translatio sancti Johannis Holensis* episcopes.
- 1229, *Translatio sancti Thorlaci episcopi secundo*.

Annal V

- 1193, *Transitus sancti Thorlaci episcopi*.
- 1198, *Translatio sancti Thorlaci episcopi*.
- 1200, *Translatio sancti Johannis episcopi ok* laugtekinn dagr hans.
- 1292, Heilagr domr Thorlaks byskups var lagiðr i skrin sitt.

Annal VI (1328–1372 only), no mention of any local saint

Annal VII

- 1106, Uigdr Jon byskop hinn helge til Hola.
- 1121, [obitus] *sanctus Iohannes primus Holensis episcopus*.
- 1174, Kosinn *sanctus Thorlacus* til byskops j Skalhollte.
- 1193 [obitus] *Sanctus Þorlacus episcopus*.
- 1198, *Translacio sancti Þorlaci* episcopes.
- 1199, *Translacio sancti Johannis Holensis* episcopes.
- 1332, [Bishop Lárentíus's will]: *ok* vigslu gull sitt er j var heilagr domr Jons byskops.
- 1360, Giorde hinn heilage Þorlacr sua mikla iartegn. *sem þeir hietu aa hann*.³
- 1388, lyst fogrum jartæignum hins heilaga Thorlaks byskups hueriar nyliga hofdu giorst.

Annal VIII

- 1106, vigdur Jon hinn helgi til byskups.
- 1121, *transitus sancti Johannis episcopi*.
- 1174, kosin Þorlacr hin helgi til byskups.
- 1193, *transitus sancti Torlaci episcopi*.

³ See also *Annal IX sub anno* 1360.

- 1198, *translacio* [sancti] *Torlaci episcopi*.
 1200, *translacio* [sancti] *Johannis episcopi*.
 1292, hin helgi *Torlacur byskup Skalaholttensis skrinlagdur*.

Annal X

- 1133, Fæddr Þorlakur hinn helgi.
 1178, wijgdur hinn helgi Þorlakur byskup.
 1192, andlat Þorlaks byskups af Skálholtti: han var merkiligur maður j
 synum lærdomi og lifnadj: hofsamur j aullu dagfare suo Islendingar
 hallda hann heilagan.

The way of saving Þorlákr's relics from a fire at Skálholt in 1309 is not always presented as miraculous in the annals. In *Annal IV* it was not the only item saved from the disaster: "ok varð borgit kalekvm flestum ok hauklvm. skrini ens h. Þorlaks byskups með helgvm domi hans. ok en littlv skrini". *Annal IX* mentions only the reliquary: "skrini ens heilaga Thorlaks vard borgit med helgum domi hans". In *Annal X*, however, the fire at Skálholt is mentioned with quite a number of details but the incident with Þorlákr's reliquary is not even touched upon. It is interesting to notice that an entry dated to 1393 in *Annal VIII* bears a striking resemblance to the notes concerning Þorlákr's reliquary being saved from the fire at Skálholt (although here it is not stated whether the reliquary of Jón or Guðmundr, or both, were saved): "Hrapadi ofan kirkian at byskupstolnum [ad] Holum med suo vndarligum atburd at huert trie brotnadi. uard þar ongu [vndan] biargat nema likneskvm og helgum domum". Perhaps it was another attempt to spread the saintly reputation of the Hólar bishops, inspired by the notes concerning Þorlákr's relics.

Appendix 5

Obituaries of 'holy men' as recorded in the Icelandic annals.

In two annals the deaths of certain individuals have been presented in a hagiographical manner, although no other information concerning their saintly status is to be found in any extant sources. Nevertheless, the entries listed below are very interesting, especially when compared with those commemorating Guðmundr Arason's death:

Annal VII

- 1282, [obitus] Jon erkebyskop j Skaurum j Gautlande. hyggia menn hann helgan.
- 1299, [obitus] virduligr herra Biarne abboti at Þyngeyrum. vattadi þui herra Laurencius byskop aa Holum at tua menn hefde hann þa set at honum syndizst heilags mannz yfir bragd hafua. var þar annar Arne byskop Þorlaks son. ok Biarne abboti. margir merkeligir lutir vurdu j framferd fyrrsagdz abbota Biarna. lios saz skina till stadarins a Þyngeyrum, ok kluckur sialfuar ringiazst.
- 1339, Obitus domini Godmundi abbatis Þyngerensis. saladez hann at Munka þuera ok var fluttr nordan likame hans till Þyngeyra. vrdu margir merkiligir atburdir j likfylgju hans. ok hyggia menn hann godan mann fyrir gude.

Annal IX

- 1339, andaziz Gudmundr abboti. hann saaladz at Munkaþveraa ok var fluttr nordan til Þyngeyra. hyggia margir hann vera helgann mann. vrdu ok margir merkiligir fyrirburdir i hans likferd.
- 1389, flutt bein Þordar Jonssonar til Stafhollz i kirkiu gard eftir skipan officialis ok samþycki allra lædra manna ok hyggia menn hann helgann mann.
- 1390, [after the description of a dramatic volcanic eruption and a flood] [...] tok ok bæ i Budarnesi ok onduduzst .xij. menn enn einn lifdi i husbrotunum ok hafdi heitid a Þord Jonsson.

Interestingly, Guðmundr Arason's death has not been marked in any significant way:

Annal I

θ Gvðmvndar byscops

Annal III

θ Guðmundar biskups

Annal V

θ Guðmundar byskups

Annal VII

θ preclarus Gudmundus episcopus

Annal VIII

Þ Guðmundr byskup

Annal X

Anno 1237 andadist Guðmundur byskup a Holum eptir stora mæðu og wtlegd er hann hafði j synu byskup dæmi.

Appendix 6

Days honouring the Icelandic holy bishops as recorded in charters.

The anniversaries of the death and/or *translatio* of the three Icelandic holy bishops have been recorded in the documentary evidence in particular ways. The words used are: *translatio* (“in translatione”), *dagr* and *messa* whenever Jón or Þorlákr are referred to, and *dagr* or *jafnle-ingdardagr* in Guðmundr’s case. The quotations listed below are taken from a variety of documents, such as church inventories and letters confirming the purchase of land. Usually those days are used to date the composition of a letter or transaction, but, in Þorlákr’s case, also to mark days on which donations to the poor were made.⁴ The sources which mention the anniversary of Guðmundr’s death belong, with one exception, to the latter category (the document from 1388 lists people employed at Hólar and their wages⁵). The extant documents which refer to Jón’s *messa* or *translatio* are of the same type.

Þorlákr:

DI I, 106. (1220): Þorláks dag⁶

DI I, 104.: *messa**

*The editors take that remark as a point of departure for the dating of the *máldagi*: the day of Þorlákr’s death, 24 December, was officially established at the general assembly in 1199 (the editor relies on the annals), but 20 July, the day of the *translatio*, only in 1237. Hence, the *máldagi* must have been composed 1200–1237.⁷

⁴ See e.g. DI II, 217. (1 September 1314, Eyjólfsstaðir in Vellir) “[...] og skal þar lukast af xij.alner fatækum monnum þorlaksmesso vm veturinn.”

⁵ “Ráðsmannsreikningr um vinnuhjúakaup á Hólum í Hjaltadal.”

⁶ “Þorlaks dag ottu song og messa.”

⁷ P. 407. See also p. 75 or 87 and the dating of the manuscripts of the Christian Law.

- DI II, 240.–336. (1318, *Auðunarmáldagi*): “ad Thorlakz degi”
 DI II, 189. (20 July [1306 or 1375]): “in translatione sancti Thorlaci”
 DI II, 365. (20 July 1326): “in translatione sancti Thorlaci”
 DI II, 408. (1331): *messa*
 DI II, 511. (c. 1345): *messa*
 DI II, 513. (26 July 1345): *messa*
 DI II, 217. (1 September 1314): “þorlaksmesso vm veturinn”
 DI III, 65. (1355): *þorlakzmessa*
 DI III, 77. (1355): *messa*
 DI III, 86. (19 July 1358): *messa*
 DI III, 154. (1363 or earlier): thorlaks Messo
 DI III, 527. (21 July 1398): *messa*
 DI III, 419.–498. (1394 and later, *Pétrsmáldagar*): “ad Thorlakz degi”
 DI IX, *7. (20 July 1375): “in translatione sancti Thorlatij”
 DI IV, 17.–300. (1397, *Vilchinsmáldagi*):
 “Þollaks messur badar”
 “Þorlaksmesso firir Jol”
 DI VI, 26. (1375): *þorlakzmessa*

*copy

Jón:

- DI III, 154. (1363 or earlier): “jons Messo hola biskups”
 DI III, 156. (4 March 1363): “*translatio johannis hola byskups*”
 DI III, 359. (29 February 1388): *jonsmessa*
 DI III, 376. (6 March 1390): *jonsmessa*
 DI VI, 30. (3 March 1390): “*translatio Johannis episcopi*”
 DI VII, 2. (1258–c. 1440*): *messa*

Guðmundr:

- DI III, 239. (14 March 1375): *guðmundardagr*
 DI III, 354. (1388): *guðmundardagr*
 DI III, 411. (16 March 1394): *jafnleingdardagr hins goda gudmundar hola biskups*
 DI VIII, 8. (1368 (18 March 1508)): *guðmundardagr*

Appendix 7

The geographical distribution of images and sagas of the Icelandic holy bishops.

The geographical distribution of images and sagas commissioned to honour the three Icelandic holy bishops, as well as their number shows still another aspect of their *fama sanctitatis*. Since the saga material may be considered the source of vital information about the authorial perception (and construction) of a cult while images—a more direct expression of a saint's actual popularity—I have decided to focus on those two forms of veneration.⁸

ÞORLÁKR:

Image (*líkneski*):

DI II, 240.–336. (1318, *Auðunarmáldagi*):

- Grýtubakki in Höfðahverfi (also *DI* III, 419.–498. (1394 and later, *Pétrsmáldagar*))
- Barð in Fljót
- Höfði in Höfðaströnd
- Bergstaður in Svartárdalur (also in 115.–149. (1360, *Máldagabók Jóns skalla*) and 419.–498. (1394 and later, *Pétrsmáldagar*))

357. (1324) Staður in Ségandafjörður

359. (1324) Galpsdalur in Geiradalur in Barðastrandarsýsla

408. (1331) Haukadalur efri in Biskupstungur

426. (1332) in Mörk under Eyjafjöll

440. (1332), *DI* III 350. (1387) and *DI* IV, 17.–300. (1397, *Vilchinsmáldagi*) Klofi at Land

452, (about 1336) Kirkjubær in Hróarstunga

492. (1343), Stafafell at Lón

DI III, 37. (1354) and 248. (1375) Hvammr in Norðurárdalur

49. (1354) Hjörsey at Mýri

115.–149. (1360):

⁸ A similar list has been included in Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, pp. 98, 115 and 159–62.

- Presthólar/Hólar in Gnúpasveit⁹ (also 419.–498 (1394 and later, *Pétrsmáldagar*))
- Spákonufell in Skagaströnd (also 419.–498. (1394 and later, *Pétrsmáldagar*))

182. (1367) Skeggjastaðir at Strandir

215. (1371) Kirkjulækur in Fljótshlíð

290. (1379) and *DI* IV, 17.–300. (1397, *Vilchinsmáldagi*) Syðri-Reykir in Mosfellssveit 419.–498. (1394 and later, *Pétrsmáldagar*):

- Laugaland in Hörgárdalur
- Garður in Kelduhverfi

DI IV, 17.–300. (1397, *Vilchinsmáldagi*):

- Hof in Eystrihreppur
- Þrandarholt
- Hæringsstaðir in Flóa
- Vetleifsholt in Holt
- Flagbjarnarholt at Land
- Hlíðarendi in Fljótshlíð
- Breiðabólstaðir in Fljótshlíð
- Kirkjulækur in Fljótshlíð
- Hof in Rangárvallasýsla
- Apavatn in Grímsnes
- Njarðvík in Gullbringusýsla
- Reykir in Mosfellssveit
- Vatnsfjörður
- Hjörsey at Mýrar
- Stafafell in Lón
- Valþjófsstaðir in Fljótshalur
- Bessastaðir in Fljótshalur
- Möðrudalur at Fjall
- Kirkjubær in Tunga
- Eiðar
- Holt at Síða
- Krossavík in Vopnafjörður

⁹ “Sijra Biorn gaf hundred j Bokum Jtem gef hann Thorlaks lykneski”

- Mjóifjörður (Mjóvafjörður) in Múlaþing
- Kóreksstaðir in Hjaltastaðarþinghá

Skrift:

DI II,

- 33. (1270) and 423. (1332) Holt under Eyjafjöll
- 386. (1327) Staðarfell in Dalasýsla
- 408. (1331) Haukadalur efri in Biskupstungur
- 411. (1331), also DI IV, 17.–300. (1397, *Vilchinsmáldagi*) Hlíð in Biskupstungur
- 421. (1332) Miðbæli under Eyjafjöll
- 479. (1340) Þykkvibærklaustur in Álptaveri Þykkvabæjarklaustur in Álptaver
- 502. (1343), DI III 379. (21 May 1390) and DI IV, 17.–300. (1397, *Vilchinsmáldagi*) Kálfafell in Fljótshverfi
- 504. (1343) and DI III 195. (1367) Skál at Síða

DI III,

- 40. (1354), also DI IV, 17.–300. (1397, *Vilchinsmáldagi*) Staðarfell in Fellsströnd
- 63. (1355) Kvennabrekka in Dalasýsla
- 90. (1358), also DI IV, 17.–300. (1397, *Vilchinsmáldagi*) Hvanneyri in Borgarfjörður
- 189. (1367), also DI IV, 17.–300. (1397, *Vilchinsmáldagi*) Bjarnanes in Hornafjörður

DI IV, 17.–300. (1397, *Vilchinsmáldagi*):

- Hlíð in Biskupstungur
- Gröf (“Pollakz skript forn”) in Hrunamannahreppur
- Gaulverjabær in Flói
- Veteifsholt in Holt
- Hólmur at Rosmhvalanes
- Meðalfell in Kjós
- Galmannstunga
- Galpsdalur
- (Narfa) Eyri
- Hallormsstaðir in Skógar
- Kirkjubær (monastery)

Saga:

DI III, 350. (1387), Klofi á Landi, *DI* III, 419.–498 (1394 and later):

Glæsibær in Eyjafjörður, 511. (2. Mai 1398, **Hólar cathedral**).

DI IV, 17.–300. (1397, *Vilchinsmáldagi*): Veteifsholt in Holt, Klofi at Land, Hlíðarendi in Fljótshlíð, Hólmur at Rosmhvalanes (“Þorláks saga forn með legendum”) Hof in Rangárvallasýsla (“Þorlaks saga a norrænu”), Melar in Melasveit (“Þorláks saga a latínu”).

JÓN:Image (líkneski):

DI III, 419.–498. (1394 and later, *Pétrsmáldagar*): Glæsibær in Eyjafjörður, Laugaland in Hörgárdalur

DI XII, 10. (1382–c. 1600), Blönduhlíð: “Enn firir líkneski Peturs postula og Jons baptistæ og Jons Holabiskups skal brenna lios vpp fra Gudsspialle og fram yfer berging.”

Skrift:

DI III, 162. (1363), Flatey in Breiðafjörður

DI IV, 17.–300. (1397, *Vilchinsmáldagi*), Helgafell monastery

Haukadalur: Þorlákr’s image (1331) and *skrift* (1331)

Klofi: Þorlákr’s image (1332 and 1387) and saga (1387)

Glæsibær: Þorlákr’s saga (1394) and Jón’s saga (1394)

Laugaland: Þorlákr’s image and Jón’s image (1394)

GUÐMUNDR:Image (líkneski):

DI III, 115.–149. (1360–1389, *Máldagabók Jóns skalla*), Hof in Skagaströnd

DI III, 419.–498. (1394 and later, *Pétrsmáldagar*), Ásgeirsá in Víðidalur

DI III, 419.–498. (1394 and later, *Pétrsmáldagar*), Fagranes in Skagafjörður

DI III, 419.–498. (1394 and later, *Pétrsmáldagar*), Svalbarð in Svalbardsströnd

The earliest note concerning the acquisition of a *líkneski* of Guðmundr is dated to 1329, and the owner of the image was Hólar, which is registered in annals.¹⁰

¹⁰ See *Annal* V: “Kom vt líkneski Guðmundar byskups ok heim til Hóla”, also *Annal* VIII and IX.

Saga:

DI II, 240.–336. (1318, *Auðunarmáldagi*), Múli in Aðaldalur

DI III, 115.–149. (*Máldagabók Jóns skalla*, 1360–1389), Goðdalir in Skagafjörður

DI III, 511. (2. Mai 1398) **Hólar cathedral** (plural: *sögur*)

Appendix 8

Episcopal sees and religious houses in Iceland

Icelandic episcopal sees and the years of their foundation:

Skálholt	ca. 1100 ¹¹
Hólar	1106

Religious houses in Iceland and the year of their foundation*:

Hólar diocese

Pingeyparar	1133, Benedictine monks
Þverá (Munkaþverá)	1155, Benedictine monks
Saurbær	ca. 1200, Augustinian friars
Reynistaður	1295, Benedictine nuns
Möðruvellir	1296, Augustinian friars

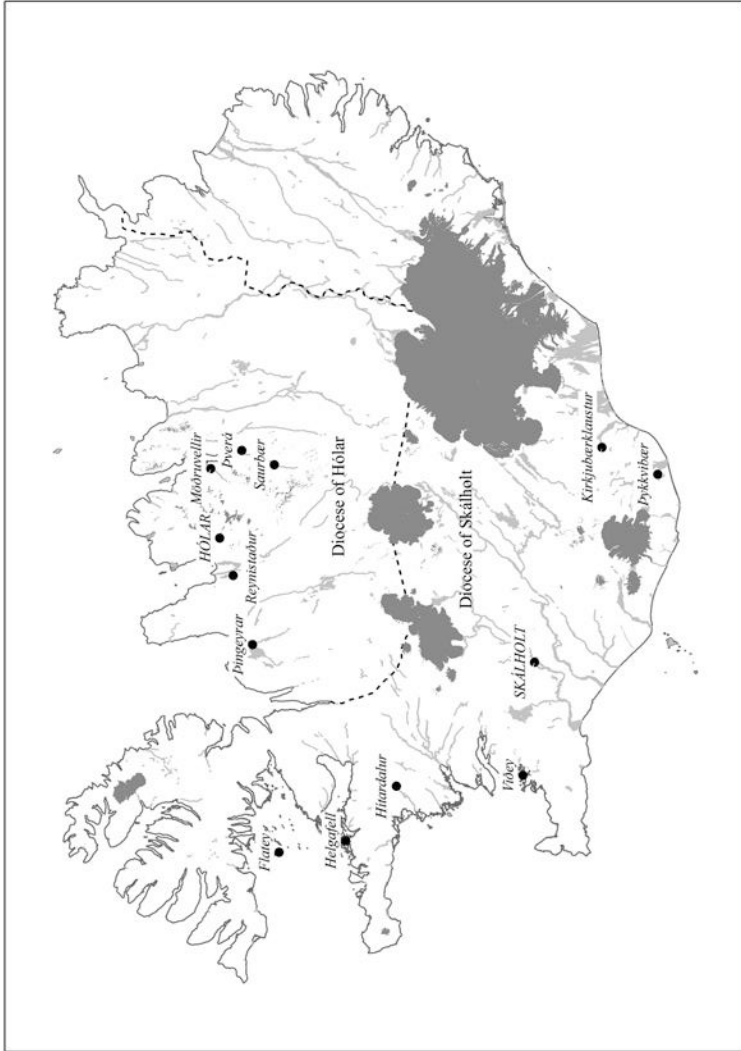
Skálholt diocese

Þykkvibær	1168, Augustinian friars
Flatey	1172, Augustinian friars
Helgafell	1184, Augustinian friars
Kirkjubær	1186, Benedictine nuns
Viðey	1226, Augustinian friars

*Skríðuklaustur is not included because of its relatively late foundation date (in 1493, which is beyond the scope of this study).¹²

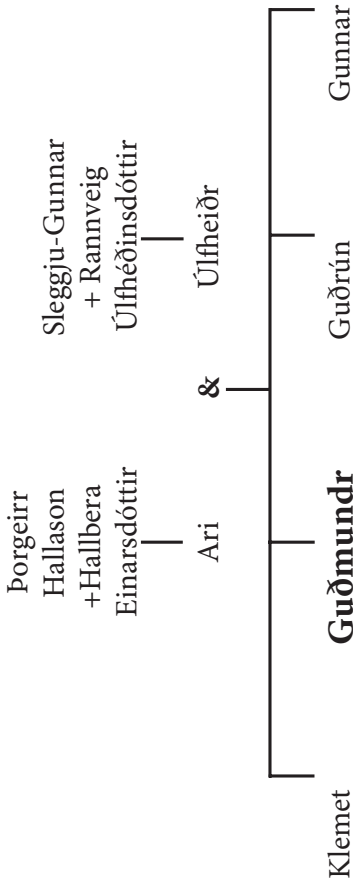
¹¹ The exact date is difficult to estimate; Gizurr Ísleifsson formally established the first episcopal see at Skálholt at the end of 1000.

¹² The origin and development of the religious houses in Iceland has been discussed e.g. in Orri Vésteinsson *Christianization of Iceland 2000: 133–143* and *Church Centres*, ed. by Helgi Þorláksson.



Map 1. Episcopel sees and religious houses in Iceland

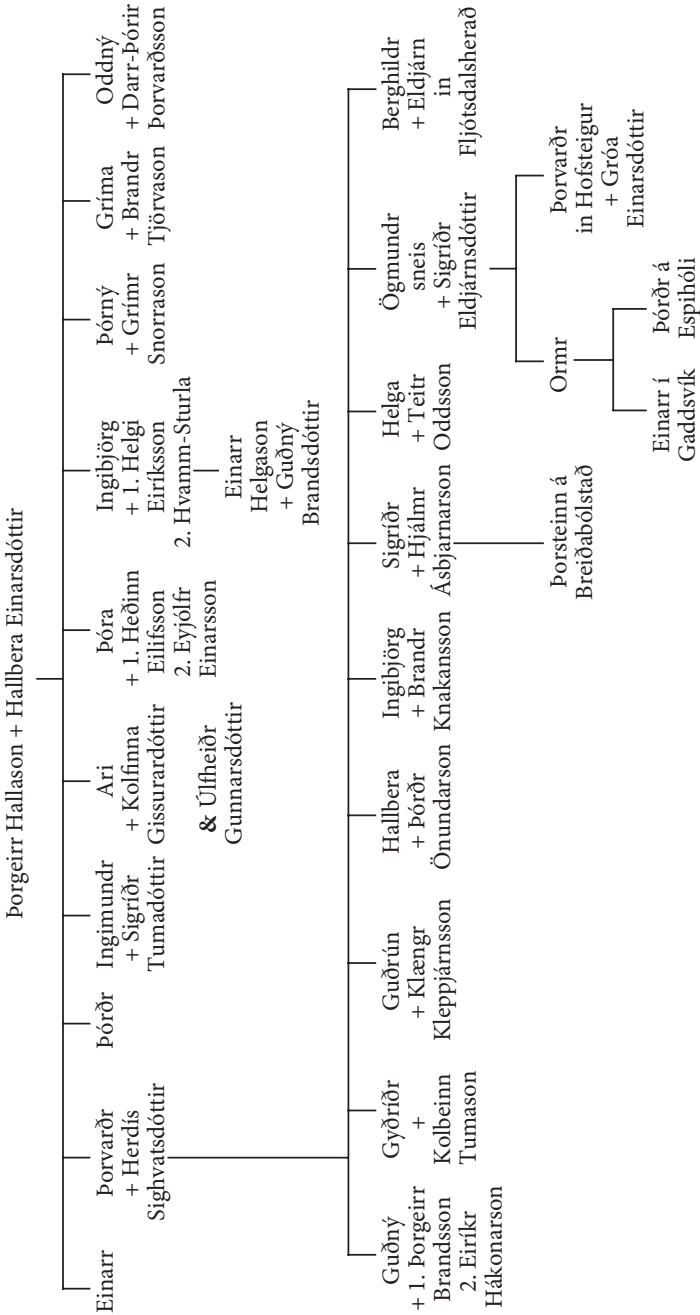
Table 2. Guðmundr Arason's family I



+ - marriage
& - informal relationship

Tables 2 and 3 are based on Genealogy 40 in *Sfs* II

Table 3. Guðmundr Arason's family II



+ - marriage
& - informal relationship

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